

# STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, March 23, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Targets in China resemble US bases

BY SETH ROBSON AND LEON COOK

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — As worrisome as North Korea's missile capability has become, defense experts say China is a more potent threat to U.S. interests in Asia, with Beijing capable of showering bases in Japan with missiles and leaving U.S. forces little time to react.

Google Earth images showing missile test sites on the edge of the Gobi Desert side by side with U.S. facilities in Japan were included in a recent "War on the Rocks" report by Navy Cmdr. Thomas Shugart, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

The analysis, which focuses on the People's Liberation Army's missile force and the threat it poses to U.S. installations, personnel and equipment in the Western Pacific, says U.S. forces would have almost no time to react to incoming Chinese missiles.

"The time available between the first detection of a missile launch by U.S. space-based missile warning sensors to its impact would probably be on the order of 10 to 15 minutes," Shugart wrote.

If that happened, U.S. aircraft would need to move and ships in port would need to be underway within minutes, he said.

Google Earth allows anyone to view sites that a few years ago only those with high-level security clearances could see, said former Air Force officer Ralph Cossa, of the Pacific Forum CSIS think tank in Hawaii.

One Chinese missile-test area looks a lot like Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, home of the 7th Fleet, with targets that appear to imitate docked Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. Other targets look like airfields, planes, air-defense batteries, fuel depots, bunkers and power stations at Kadena and Misawa air bases. Some images show the impacts of missiles on mock runways covered in hundreds of blast craters.

Defense experts don't think the U.S. and China will fight anytime soon, but much of the war gaming that the U.S. does in the Western Pacific — such as recent maritime drills with Japan in the East China Sea — is geared toward scenarios that could arise in such a conflict.

The report, which preceded recent North Korean missile tests, said the U.S. and its allies should publicly practice defense against mass ballistic-missile attacks.

"Skeptics might say that catching the U.S. flat-footed would be unlikely, but history teaches us not to discount the possibility of successful surprise attacks," Shugart wrote.

Servicemembers at Yokota Air Base — headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force in Tokyo — spent six days last month practicing how they would respond to a missile attack. The exercise included a mock warning, broadcast over the base's public-address system, that missiles were incoming and personnel should assume Mission Oriented Protective Posture 4 by putting on protective suits, rubber boots,

gloves and gas masks.

"We're not expecting any attacks like this, but we should always be ready," said Senior Master Sgt. Greg Lilly, a member of a team inspecting troops involved in the drills.

A group of airmen from Yokota's 374th Communications Squadron were wearing protective suits and boots when they heard the warning. It took them less than two minutes to don masks and gloves, to seal their suits and to lie on the floor, sheltering from a mock explosion while Lilly checked their equipment for leaks.

In another part of the base, inspectors checked organizations' ability to maintain command and control after an attack, to detect chemical agents and to decontaminate personnel.

"As long as our guys are safe, we'll get the planes in the sky," Lilly said.

Yokota's 374th Civil Engineer Squadron also trained to repair damaged airfields. Clad in chemical-protection gear, the engineers cut into concrete and patched it as if it had been hit by enemy bombs or missiles.

Patriot air- and missile-defense batteries guarding U.S. and allied bases in Japan seem unlikely to succeed against a mass Chinese raid, Shugart wrote in the report. He recommended the U.S. deploy the Army's Terminal High Altitude Air Defense system, known as THAAD, to Japan and/or task destroyers equipped with the Aegis ballistic-missile defense system with defending U.S. bases.

## Taliban forces seize Afghanistan's Sangin district

*The Washington Post*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Taliban insurgents captured a key district center in embattled Helmand Province on Thursday, Afghan officials said, while Afghan troops were evacuated from the area and Air Force planes bombed military installations there to prevent the Taliban from using them.

NATO denied the district of Sangin had fallen but said Afghan forces had "repositioned" the district government and police

headquarters about 2 kilometers to the south because the previous location and damage in the area "made it difficult to provide necessary services."

"Security forces still control the district and the military operation against the Taliban in the area is ongoing," Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman Dawlat Waziri said in Kabul.

Sangin district was once a prize over which insurgents battled British and American troops for control, with high casualties on all sides. For the past year, Tal-

iban forces have been pressing to retake it as part of their broader push to dominate the desert province bordering Pakistan.

Officials said there was heavy fighting in the area overnight and that Afghan troops were moved to a military base about a mile away, according to government officials cited in Afghan TV news reports.

After they reached safety and withdrew their equipment, their installations were bombed and destroyed.

There were no immediate details on casualties.

## USS Laboon fights drug smuggling in Mideast

BY CHRIS CHURCH  
*Stars and Stripes*

MANAMA, Bahrain — Guided-missile destroyer the USS Laboon was at it again last week, making a second major drug bust in a matter of days in the Arabian Sea, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command said in a statement.

In the most recent intercept, on March 17, Laboon seized 500 kilograms of hashish from a small stateless dhow, the command said Tuesday.

On March 13, Laboon found 270 kilograms of heroin aboard a stateless dhow in the Arabian Sea.

Also this month, Australian navy ship the HMAS Arunta seized 800 kilograms of hashish from a fishing vessel.

Both Laboon and Arunta are part of Combined Task Force 150, one of three task forces with the U.S.-led combined maritime forces. The 31-nation naval partnership operates across some 3.2 million square miles of international waters, including some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. CTF 150 focuses on maritime security and counterterrorism throughout the Middle East.

The second seizure by the ship in the short time period is a sign of superb training and preparedness, Royal Canadian navy Commodore Haydn Edmundson, the commander for combined task force 150, said in a statement.

"These boardings, whether they result in a successful seizure or not, are some of the most complex and dangerous evolutions that our sailors conduct on the high seas."

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## EUCOM chief seeks more assets

BY JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. European Command is seeking additional forces and firepower to augment a U.S. military that has dwindled in size while Russia has grown stronger, America's top general in Europe said Thursday.

"EUCOM is coordinating across the [Defense Department] to obtain the forces we need in every warfare domain," Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti said in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee. "This may include additional maneuver forces, combat air squadrons, anti-submarine capabilities, a carrier strike group and maritime amphibious capabilities."

Scaparrotti's testimony represents the most explicit and wide-ranging request by a EUCOM chief for more assets since the end of the Cold War. Without rotational forces added to EUCOM's force mix in the past year, Scaparrotti said, the command would not have suf-

ficient assets "to deter Russia from further aggression."

EUCOM has experienced a period of adjustment over the past several years, with a headquarters that has shifted its focus from "security cooperation" with allies to rebuilding warfighting command and control skills.

"We are adjusting our posture, plans and readiness to respond to possible future conflicts," Scaparrotti said.

There are questions about whether EUCOM has sufficient forces to lead in a fight or deter a more aggressive Russia, senators said.

"We still have no long-term vision for force posture in Europe," committee Chairman Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said.

Since the Cold War, the U.S. military in Europe has dwindled from 300,000 servicemembers to roughly 62,000. With President Donald Trump seeking a larger Pentagon budget, it remains unclear how much of a focus Europe will be. Military leaders have singled out Russia as a singular threat, but Trump

wants better ties with Moscow.

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., questioned whether Trump's overtures were undermining EUCOM attempts to "reassure" allies. "We do not have a commander in chief who is willing to say out loud what everyone knows," said McCaskill, who called Russian President Vladimir Putin a "thug."

In a sign of the renewed focus on Europe, the Army has begun looking for additional bases in the event the Pentagon moves to reposition more troops on the Continent.

"We have to get our posture correct for deterrence, and that is across all the services," Scaparrotti said. "In Europe, I don't have the carrier or the submarine capacity that would best enable me to do my job in EUCOM." More stockpiles of munitions are also needed, he said.

Russia's buildup in the fortified enclave of Kaliningrad and its western military district has heightened concerns about Moscow's ability to deny access to the area in a conflict.

## US combat airlift of Arab, Kurdish forces marks deepening involvement in Syria

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is deepening its involvement in the war against the Islamic State group after an unprecedented American airlift of Arab and Kurdish fighters to the front lines in northern Syria, supported by the first use of U.S. attack helicopters and artillery in the country.

The U.S. forces didn't engage in ground combat, but the offensive suggests the Trump administration is taking an increasingly aggressive approach as it plans an upcoming assault on the extremists' self-declared capital of Raqqa. In addition to using helicopters to ferry rebels into combat near the Tabqa Dam on the Euphrates River, the U.S. also flew two Apache

gunships and fired Marine 155 mm artillery.

"This is pretty major," Col. Joseph Scrocca, a spokesman for the U.S.-led military coalition that is fighting the Islamic State militants in Syria and Iraq, told reporters at the Pentagon on Wednesday. He said it was the first time U.S. forces have airlifted local fighters into combat in Syria. An undisclosed number of U.S. military advisers were inserted with the rebels.

U.S. officials said the operation inserted Syrian Arab and Kurdish fighters behind Islamic State group lines west of Raqqa, subjecting the American personnel to a degree of risk previously avoided in Syria. The mission was focused on recapturing the dam, the

nearby town of Tabqa and a local airfield.

By design, the operation is coinciding with a potentially climactic battle for Mosul, the main Islamic State group stronghold in Iraq. Together, the battles reflect a U.S. strategy of presenting the Islamic State group with multiple challenges simultaneously.

Scrocca said the assault in Syria is expected to last for weeks. He said the dam has been used as an Islamic State headquarters, prison for high-profile hostages, training camp and location for planning overseas attacks since 2013. There has been concern the Islamic State group might destroy the dam, flooding the region and creating new humanitarian challenges.



## AF weighs retirement of F-15C, shift to F-16

By TARA COPP  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Air Force is weighing whether it should retire its fleet of F-15C fighters from its active-duty and reserve units and transition those crews to F-16s with upgraded radars, service leaders revealed Wednesday to House lawmakers.

"Has there been a decision or a proposal by the Air Force to get rid of the F-15C and to replace it with F-16s with new radar on it?" Rep. Martha McCally, R-Ariz., asked Air Force leaders during a hearing of the House Armed Services subcommittee on readiness. "This is the first I've heard of it."

Maj. Gen. Scott West, who is the Air Force director of current operations, told subcommittee members that the service is in the "pre-decisional stage" of potentially replacing the aircraft.

"I don't know if that's formal, but I know we are discussing ways to maximize [the Air Force budget] and minimize the number of systems that we operate," he said.

Lt. Gen. Scott Rice, director of the Air National Guard, said the retirement also would apply to Guard and Reserve F-15Cs.

The Air Force has 212 F-15Cs and 949 F-16s. It was not immediately clear which of two models of the F-16 would replace the F-15C.

Rice said retiring F-15Cs is one of several options that the Air Force started to consider in the fall. If the aircraft is retired, it could take effect as early as fiscal year 2019, he said.

"There's about four or five different options," Rice said. "One of the options is retiring the F-15Cs and replacing them with F-16s with upgraded AESA (Active Electronically Scanned Array) radars."

The AESA radar improves an aircraft's ability to simultaneously scan for air-to-air and air-to-ground threats.

## Lawmaker: GI training is at risk

*CQ-Roll Call*

WASHINGTON — The U.S. armed forces will see training severely curtailed if the continuing resolution funding the federal government is extended for the rest of the fiscal year, a leading lawmaker warned Wednesday.

Texas Republican Mac Thornberry, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said at a press breakfast that he has asked the military what the effect of a full-year continuing resolution would be. He said he had not heard from all branches but offered a few startling examples.

"All but one deploying Army unit will cease training after July 15th, and that includes units scheduled to deploy to Korea and Europe," Thornberry said. "The Marine Corps will cease all flight operations in July and have to get rid of over 2,000 Marines."

Thornberry was joined at the breakfast by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He said extending the resolution for the full fiscal year would be "almost criminal."

The comments signal a stepped-up campaign by de-

fense hawks over the coming month to increase pressure on their colleagues to clear a new fiscal 2017 Pentagon spending bill. The hawks would like that measure to include a \$30 billion supplemental, and then they'd like to see a fiscal 2018 spending package that is even higher than the one President Donald Trump has outlined.

The hawks' wish list, however, faces significant obstacles.

Earlier this month, the House passed a \$577.9 billion defense spending bill for the current fiscal year that would replace the continuing resolution, which expires April 28.

But it's unclear how or when nondefense spending measures will move. The only fiscal 2017 spending bill to be enacted is the one covering military construction and veterans programs.

Senate Democrats will resist passing the fiscal 2017 defense bill without nondefense bills included in the package. And if they are included, Democrats will push for what they consider to be adequate levels of nondefense funding.

Assuming lawmakers are able to agree on some kind of omnibus federal spending package for fiscal 2017, that doesn't mean the risks to it are gone.

The package could be a magnet for divisive policy riders from one or both parties. That would trigger partisan sniping that could threaten the spending bill's chances of clearing.

All this must be sorted out in a legislative calendar jammed with issues such as a health care overhaul and a nominee for the Supreme Court, McCain said. Over the next month, there are relatively few working days because of recesses.

McCain told reporters he has been talking with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell about putting the defense bill to a vote soon on the Senate floor.

Many experts believe that as a result of all those factors, another continuing resolution is more likely than not. Lawmakers may look to extend the resolution for just a few weeks to give them time to negotiate and clear a final bill. But with less than half the fiscal year left, the temptation to extend it for just five more months will be great.

Thornberry said there are consequences if defense spending falls victim to political disagreements.

"That's part of the reason the impacts I was talking about with the Marines and so forth are so stark," he said.

## Army set to get lighter combat helmets

By ALEX HORTON  
*Stars and Stripes*

SAN ANTONIO — There are two timeless complaints soldiers make: what they eat and the weight they carry.

A Vermont company is set to help with one of those after being awarded a maximum \$98 million contract to produce the Advanced Combat Helmet Generation II, 24 percent lighter than the current model, according to Revision Military, the manufacturer.

The contract allows for about 290,000 helmets to be produced by March 2022, Eric Houchell, the vice president of armor at Revision Military, said Wednesday.

That order would go a long

way toward outfitting more than half of the Army's current end strength of 467,000 soldiers, according to a January count by the Pentagon.

"Our understanding is that this is [the Army's] next helmet," Houchell said.

The Army asked to maintain the geometry and protection of the current Advanced Combat Helmet but needed a reduction in weight, Houchell said. The new helmet is 2.45 pounds, down from the current model, which weighs 3.23 pounds.

The helmet is just as strong as the previous model but uses Ultra-High-Molecular-Weight Polyethylene in its construction, a lighter material than the synthetic fiber used in what is

commonly referred to as Kevlar, Houchell said.

"There is a constant effort to get weight off the soldier as the Army adds other things," he said.

The new model, like its predecessor, is rated to stop various sizes of fragments and 9 mm handgun rounds while retaining Army standards to protect against hard impacts that can lead to traumatic brain injuries, Houchell said.

The demand for equipment to be lighter will always be a priority, he said.

"If you can take weight off that part of the body, you're going to make the soldier more comfortable and more effective," he said.

## Top Senate Dem to oppose Gorsuch

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top Democrat in the Senate said Thursday he will oppose the nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch to serve on the Supreme Court and encouraged other Democrats to reject President Donald Trump's choice, setting up a showdown with majority Republicans.

Shortly before New York Sen. Chuck Schumer's announcement, Pennsylvania Sen. Bob Casey, who faces re-election next year in a state Trump won, also announced his opposition. Casey said he had "serious concerns about Judge Gorsuch's rigid and restrictive judicial philosophy, manifest in a number of opinions he has written on the 10th Circuit."

The opposition from the two Democrats came after two days of hearings in which Gorsuch emerged with solid Republican support.

The Judiciary Committee is expected to vote in the next two weeks to recommend Gorsuch to the Senate. Though he is expected to be confirmed, the process on the Senate floor is less assured.

Some Democrats already have said they want to try to block the nomination. That means Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., will have to round up 60 votes to proceed to a confirmation vote, including eight Democrats.

It's unclear if he will have those votes.

Democrats Jeff Merkley, of Oregon; Kirsten Gillibrand, of New York; Sherrod Brown, of Ohio; Tammy Baldwin, of Wisconsin; Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts; and Ed Markey, of Massachusetts, have declared their opposition.

No Democrat yet has pledged to support the judge, but Sen. Joe Manchin, of West Virginia, said Wednesday he is open to voting for him. McConnell also could change Senate rules to confirm Gorsuch with a simple majority and appears prepared to take that step.

On Thursday, lawyers, advocacy groups and former colleagues are set to have their say on Gorsuch.

The panel was to hear from the American Bar Association, which has already given him a unanimous "well qualified" rating, along with former colleagues and judges supporting him, and advocacy groups like the Human Rights Campaign that have opposed him.

The nominee received glowing GOP reviews but complaints from frustrated Democrats that he concealed his views from the American public. Gorsuch, a federal appeals court judge in Denver, refused repeated attempts to get him to talk about key legal and political issues of the day. But he did tell Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who worried Gorsuch would vote to restrict abortion, that "no one is looking to return us to horse-and-buggy days."

## Claim renews fight over Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Intelligence Committee chairman privately apologized to his Democratic colleagues Thursday yet publicly defended his decision to discuss and brief President Donald Trump on secret intercepts he says swept up communications of Trump's transition team.

Rep. Devin Nunes' decision to disclose the information before talking to committee members outraged Democrats and raised questions about the independence of the panel's probe of Russian interference into the 2016 election and possible contacts between Trump associates and Russia.

A congressional aide familiar with the California Republican's meeting said the chairman apologized to Democrats and pledged to work with them and to share information related to the investigation.

Nunes' critics also questioned if he was coordinating with the White House in order to give the president cover for his claims that former President Barack Obama wiretapped Trump.

Nunes, who served on Trump's transition

team, ducked questions about whether he was parroting information given to him by the White House, saying only that he was "not going to ever reveal sources." He said Trump's explosive wiretapping allegations against Obama were false.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said Nunes apologized to the minority members of the committee. She told reporters on Capitol Hill she doesn't know where the information came from but recalled a comment Trump made in a Fox News interview earlier this month in which he said the White House "will be submitting things before the committee very soon that hasn't been submitted as of yet."

Nunes said he received the new intelligence information after FBI Director James Comey testified before the Intelligence Committee. He said it revealed that Trump's transition associates — and perhaps Trump, himself — had their communications picked up through legal surveillance.

Speaking to reporters outside the White House, Nunes said, "What I've read bothers me, and I think it should bother the president, himself, and his team."

## Islamic State claims attack in UK; US man among dead

Associated Press

LONDON — The Islamic State group claimed responsibility Thursday for an attack by a man who plowed an SUV into pedestrians on one of London's famous bridges and then stabbed a police officer to death at Britain's Parliament. In a somber-but-defiant statement, Britain's prime minister declared that "we are not afraid."

The man who killed three people Wednesday and was shot to death by police was born in Britain and once came under investigation for links to religious extremism, British Prime Minister Theresa May said Thursday in a sweeping speech before the House of Commons.

British officials named the attacker as Khalid Masood, 52, a man with criminal convictions who was living in the West Midlands, which includes Birmingham.

Police raided properties in London and Birmingham, and made eight arrests.

A Utah man visiting London with his wife for their 25th anniversary and a British woman who was a school administrator were killed by the SUV attack on Westminster Bridge and at least 29 others were hospitalized, seven critically.

May set an unyielding tone Thursday, saluting the heroism of police as well as the ordinary actions of everyone who went about their lives in the aftermath.

"As I speak, millions will be boarding trains and airplanes to travel to London, and to see for themselves the greatest city on Earth," she told the House of Commons. "It is in these actions — millions of acts of normality — that we find the best response to terrorism — a response that denies our enemies their victory, that refuses to let them win, that shows we will never give in."

Parliament began its moment of silence at 9:33 a.m., honoring the shoulder number of the slain officer, Keith Palmer, a 15-year veteran of the Metropolitan Police and former soldier.

The Islamic State group said through its Amaq News Agency that the London attacker was a soldier of the Islamic State who "carried out the operation in response to calls for targeting citizens of the coalition" of countries fighting the group in Syria and Iraq.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Distraught man shot after high-speed chase

**FL** DELAND — Authorities said a 911 call about a man who was “shooting up the place” led to a high-speed chase that ended with an officer fatally shooting the suspect in central Florida.

Volusia County Sheriff Mike Chitwood said a woman told dispatchers the 45-year-old man was drinking and suicidal outside a law office.

She said he was distraught over marital issues.

When authorities arrived, the man was firing shots at the building and at officers. Chitwood said the man got into a Mercedes and sped away.

The man eventually got out of the car. Officers and deputies say it appeared he reloaded his gun. Chitwood said the man ignored requests to drop his gun. Two deputies and one DeLand police officer fired.

## County bans flying drones near prison

**NY** WHITE PLAINS — Officials in Westchester County have banned flying drones near the county jail as a security measure.

The Journal News reported the Westchester County Board of Legislators unanimously approved the law March 6. The legislation outlaws flying drones within 1,000 feet of the county jail in Valhalla.

Officials say the law is designed to prevent people from dropping contraband to inmates. A drone was used in a 2015 incident in which a machine delivered heroin and other drugs to inmates in an Ohio prison. A drone was also used in a failed handgun and narcotic drop in Maryland.

Those who break the law will face a penalty and a fine. Second-time offenders can be

charged with a misdemeanor.

## No reduced sentence for killer of 3 people

**MA** WOBURN — A Massachusetts judge has ruled that a man convicted of killing a pregnant woman and her two children 30 years ago must serve at least 45 years in prison.

Daniel LaPlante was given three consecutive life sentences without parole for fatally shooting Priscilla Gustafson, 33, and drowning Abigail, 7, and William, 5, in 1987. He was 17 at the time.

He asked to be resentenced based on court decisions that said juveniles cannot be sentenced to life without parole. He wanted to have his sentence revised so two sentences were concurrent, which could have made him eligible for parole this year. The judge ruled Thursday he must serve at least 15 years for each killing.

## Coffee shop staffed mostly by ex-offenders

**MI** KALAMAZOO — A new coffee shop and cafe in downtown Kalamazoo is almost completely staffed by ex-offenders as part of a culinary arts program at Kalamazoo Probation Enhancement Program.

The Walnut & Park Cafe officially opened last week. The shop serves coffees ground by the Water Street Coffee Roaster along with homemade baked goods, breakfast and lunch dishes.

Graduates of the 10-week culinary program earn certifications in culinary arts and ServSafe, a food safety and protection program.

The goal of the cafe is to help staff build their resumes so they are able to have marketable recent job experience.

## Suit challenges law that regulates butter

**WI** MADISON — Wisconsin resident Jean Smith snatches up entire stocks of her beloved Kerrygold Irish butter from stores when visiting family in Nebraska, thanks to an antiquated law in her dairy-obsessed state that bans it and any other butter that hasn't been graded for quality.

Tired of trekking across state lines to stock up, she and a handful of other Wisconsin butter aficionados filed a lawsuit this week challenging the law, saying local consumers and businesses “are more than capable of determining whether butter is sufficiently creamy, properly salted, or too crumbly.”

No government help needed, they say.

Anybody convicted of selling unlabeled or ungraded butter is subject to a fine between \$100 and \$1,000 and six months in jail.

## Absence of comma allows suit to proceed

**ME** PORTLAND — It all came down to a missing comma. In the end, a court allowed drivers for a Maine dairy to go forward with their dispute over overtime pay.

Drivers for Oakhurst Dairy in Portland sued in federal court seeking more than \$10 million in overtime.

The company argued they were exempt under the law.

Maine law says overtime doesn't apply to certain duties and lists them, including “packing for shipment or distribution of” foods.

There's no comma in the phrase so the drivers said it refers to packing only, which they don't do. Oakhurst said it refers to packing and to distribution.

The federal appeals court agreed with the drivers.

As Circuit Judge David Barron said, “For want of a comma, we have this case.”

## Name picked for gorilla born at Omaha zoo

**NE** OMAHA — Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium has announced the name of gorilla born in January.

The zoo says Kgosi was the name picked by Henry Doorly, keeper for the male western lowland gorilla born Jan. 18. The name, an African word meaning “king,” was submitted by Aven Cramer, 13, of Omaha.

The name was selected from a total of 825 names submitted.

The parents of Kgosi are Timu, 21, and Tambo, 22. The mother, Timu, came to the zoo from the Cincinnati Zoo in 1996. The father, Tambo, arrived in 2001 from the Bronx Zoo.

## Anti-Trump billboard draws death threats

**AZ** PHOENIX — The artist who created an anti-Trump billboard overlooking a busy Phoenix highway says she's been receiving death threats.

Karen Fiorito was commissioned by a Phoenix art gallery to design a billboard that would comment on the administration of President Donald Trump.

One side of the billboard depicts Trump's face, flanked by mushroom clouds and dollar signs mimicking Nazi swastikas.

The other side of the billboard shows, one word, “Unity,” with five hands spelling out the word in sign language.

The Arizona Republic reported the billboard went up Friday night and Fiorito said she and her husband began receiving death threats Saturday morning.

From wire reports

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# US rolls to 1st World Baseball Classic has bright future ahead

## tourney crown

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The eagle has landed on top.

The U.S. routed Puerto Rico 8-0 to win its first World Baseball Classic in four tries on Wednesday behind six hitless innings from Marcus Stroman.

The Americans put their eagle statue mascot on the mound in celebration, a blue cap jauntily hanging from one of its large wings.

"It's a different feeling when the USA is on your chest," first baseman Eric Hosmer said. "We wanted to get the U.S. back on top of the baseball world, and we did that."

For a sport known as America's pastime, the U.S. had struggled since the WBC began in 2006. Twice, the Americans lost in the second round and they went out in the semifinals in 2009.

This time was different.

"These guys were here to do their best," Team USA general manager Joe Torre said. "The thing I marveled at was how quickly they came together, and Jimmy (Leyland) deserves a lot of that credit. They're just a great group who understood what this event is all about."

Accepting the gleaming silver trophy from baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred, manager Leyland told the crowd, "This is for the men and women who serve our country."

The U.S. pounded out 13 hits and finished with a 6-2 record while making the final for the first time in front of 51,565 at Dodger Stadium.

Puerto Rico's fans saluted their team with a standing ovation and the players responded by clapping.

"The satisfaction is huge," manager Edwin Rodriguez said. "It has filled our hearts."

Puerto Rico lost for the first

time in eight games after outscoring the opposition 55-26. The U.S. territory finished runner-up for the second time, having lost to the Dominican Republic in the 2013 final.

"They're loaded with All-Star players. They outpitched us. They outscored us. They outhit us," Rodriguez said. "We came here to win the championship, but with a record of 7-1, we feel satisfied, pleased with what we were able to achieve."

Tournament MVP Stroman avenged his shakiness in the Americans' 6-5 loss to Puerto Rico during pool play. The right-hander from the Toronto Blue Jays gave up one hit in six-plus innings, struck out three and walked one on 73 pitches.

"I love pitching in these moments," he said. "I love the atmosphere. I feel like the bigger the game, the more I'm able to get up, the more effective I am."

Stroman allowed just three balls past the infield until Angel Pagan's double in the left-field corner leading off the seventh, when he departed to a standing ovation, having staked the Americans to a 7-0 lead with the help of Ian Kinsler's two-run homer.

In 2013, Stroman tweeted that he was going to play for Puerto Rico, where his mother was born. Instead, he wore the red, white and blue of the U.S.

"It was an unbelievable experience," he said, "and I'll be back in four years to defend the title."

For the tournament, Stroman allowed 12 hits and four runs in 15<sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> innings, with a 2.35 ERA, nine strikeouts and two walks.

"Marcus set the tone right off the bat and just was dealing," said outfielder Christian Yelich. "We kind of fed off that and we were just rolling ever since."

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Even before the United States took the field to face Puerto Rico for the World Baseball Classic championship on Wednesday night, Rob Manfred was confident in declaring this sometimes troubled tournament to be a smashing success.

The Major League Baseball Commissioner's confidence seemed well-founded when the Americans claimed their first WBC title in grand style with an 8-0 victory at raucous Dodger Stadium.

The fourth edition of the WBC was the best-attended, the most-viewed worldwide and likely the most entertaining.

And this tournament's long-term health is undeniably improved by the home team winning it all for the first time.

"We've had crowds that not only were record-number crowds, but had passion that it's hard to think where you saw something that good the last time," Manfred said shortly before the first pitch. "Just really amazing. And best of all, the games on the field have been absolutely unbelievable, compelling. Our players at their best, combined with a little nationalism, has really been a great thing."

Manfred and players' union head Tony Clark appear to be in complete agreement on the success of the 2017 WBC, which attracted more than 1 million fans for the first time and expanded its television reach as a unique worldwide platform for the game. Even before the enthusiastic worldwide reception and the U.S. team's winning surge at home, the WBC was expected to top \$100 million in revenue this year for the first time, according to organizers.

Although no deal is firmly in place, Manfred and Clark are confident there will be a fifth WBC, most likely in 2021 after baseball makes its Olympic return in Tokyo in 2020.

"I think when you have a tournament that gets the kind of traction that the 2017 edition did, it will make it easier to get players the next time around,"

Manfred said. "Not only for the U.S., but for all the countries."

The robust ratings for MLB Network's game broadcasts and the raucous crowds of costumed, singing fans in Los Angeles and Miami belied the WBC's biggest problem, one that still prevents a dwindling number of American fans and players from taking it seriously.

While the WBC sells out stadiums and sparks baseball curiosity from Tokyo to Tel Aviv, the event still must persuade U.S. players and fans that it's a world-class competition while the biggest American stars are skipping it. Mike Trout, Clayton Kershaw, Kris Bryant, Madison Bumgarner, Chris Sale and Bryce Harper were among the American luminaries who stayed in their big-league camps.

The confetti-strewn celebration in Chavez Ravine should have a few superstars realizing they missed out on something great.

"I don't mean this to sound wrong, but for the most part, up until this point, the other countries were probably into this event a little bit more than the United States," manager Jim Leyland said. "But in talking to our players, I know they're going to spread the word. I've had some players already tell me this is the greatest experience of their life."

This group of 18 All-Stars got the U.S. into the final for the first time this year. The U.S. then capitalized with a championship game rout, capping a streak of three straight dramatic victories in must-win contests — the last two against previously unbeaten Japan and Puerto Rico.

Clark believes many more players appreciated the WBC's unique appeal after watching this tournament. Shortly after the opening games, he began getting calls and texts from players who wished they had taken advantage of the chance.

"The opportunity to wear your country across your chest is something, particularly if you haven't experienced it before," Clark said.



# SEC gains ground as basketball power

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Tennessee's Rick Barnes has coached in the Big East, the Atlantic Coast Conference and the Big 12. He's made the NCAA Tournament nearly two dozen times and advanced to the Final Four.

He's been around. He's seen it done a number of different ways.

So Barnes has credibility when he raves about his current league, the Southeastern Conference.

"I've said it all year: This league is better than everybody's giving it credit for," Barnes said Tuesday. "It's not like I told you so, but the fact is this basketball league is better. What I'm ecstatic about is we've had to overcome the perception that it wasn't very good, and we've got teams that have gone out and played good basketball."

Long considered a football power, the SEC is showing some basketball promise. The league, which many thought might get just three teams in the NCAA Tournament a few months ago, could have three in the Elite Eight.

Kentucky, Florida and South

Carolina play in the Sweet 16 on Friday night. The second-seeded Wildcats (31-5) face No. 3 seed UCLA in Memphis, Tennessee. The fourth-seeded Gators (26-8) take on No. 8 seed Wisconsin in New York City, shortly after the seventh-seeded Gamecocks (24-10) play No. 3 seed Baylor.

The SEC joins three other conferences that have three teams in the Sweet 16 — the Big Ten, Big 12 and Pac 12.

Given how the SEC has performed in the tournament so far, it might be foolish to bet against them.

Kentucky is one of the hottest teams remaining, having won 13 in a row since losing at Florida in early February. The Gators looked as solid as anyone in the first two rounds, beating East Tennessee State and Virginia by a combined 41 points. And the Gamecocks pulled off one of the bracket's biggest upsets by knocking off No. 2 seed Duke in Greenville, S.C.

Throw in oh-so-close losses by Arkansas and Vanderbilt, and the SEC has reason to brag.

The Razorbacks rallied from a 17-point deficit to take a 65-60 lead in the final minutes and looked like they would stun

top-seeded North Carolina in the second round. But the Tar Heels closed out the game with a 12-0 run that left Arkansas imagining what might have been.

The Commodores had similar thoughts after giving away their NCAA opener against Northwestern. Commodores guard Matthew Fisher-Davis intentionally and inexplicably grabbed Northwestern's Bryant McIntosh despite his team leading by 1. His mistake — Fisher-Davis thought Vandy was down 1 — sent McIntosh to the free-throw line for the go-ahead points with 14.6 seconds left. Vanderbilt lost 68-66.

"Our conference is pretty good," South Carolina coach Frank Martin said. "I don't need to keep repeating that. I think anyone with any kind of understanding of basketball can start making those assessments on their own without me having to force feed it down their throats."

The league has come a long way in a short time, especially considering it ranked seventh in conference RPI in 2013.

After landing just three teams in the 2016 NCAA Tournament once again, the SEC hired for-

mer Big East Commissioner Mike Tranghese to bolster the league's basketball profile and postseason presence.

Tranghese's plan started with scheduling games against better competition and winning more of those key, nonconference matchups. The SEC now mandates that nonconference opponents must have a three-year RPI average of 175 or better. That number will drop to 150 in the future.

The SEC also went 5-5 in the SEC/Big 12 Challenge after winning just 10 of 30 meetings in the first three years of the inter-conference showcase.

"We don't really get talked about a lot, basketball-wise," Florida forward Devin Robinson said. "They talk a lot of football and things like that. The SEC is a tough league. ... That conference got us ready to play against anybody in different matchups and different types of offenses and different types of defenses, so it just gets us ready for just playing against other opponents."

The league, which has 11 national titles in men's basketball, might have its best days ahead.

## Thornwell downplays role in leading SC to Sweet 16

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — South Carolina's Sindarius Thornwell squirms and shakes his head slightly when the Gamecocks are referred to as a one-man team. He might as well get comfortable with the description.

Thornwell has become the Jadeveon Clowney for men's basketball, the face of a basketball program the way the former No. 1 NFL Draft pick was for Gamecocks football.

Clowney was even in the stands Sunday to witness Thornwell's performance in one of the NCAA Tournament's surprises this year, the Gamecocks' 88-81 upset of Duke to reach their first Sweet 16 since 1973.

Thornwell downplays his role, saying, "There are a lot of people on this team."

Yes, but it's the wiry, 6-foot-5 senior who's leading the way, igniting offensive spurts, grabbing the essential rebound or making the late stop.

"He's the best, unheralded, great player

in the United States," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said the day before Thornwell scored 24 points in the upset win.

Thornwell's next chance to shine is Friday night on one of basketball's flashiest stages, facing No. 3 seed Baylor at Madison Square Garden for a spot in the Elite Eight.

It's been a year of revelation and redemption for Thornwell, who is one of those rare combinations of NBA prospect and four-year college player. But he has gotten better throughout his career.

"To be who he is, to grow the way he's grown, to represent us the way he does, to be loved by his teammates like he is, that's powerful stuff," South Carolina coach Frank Martin said. "He's letting the world see it."

Thornwell, a South Carolina native from Lancaster, was a solid recruit from Oak Hill Academy. He picked the home-state Gamecocks over North Carolina State to become Martin's first high-profile signee.

Thornwell averaged 13.4 points a game

his first year to make the all-Southeastern Conference freshman team with many wondering if he was going to quickly jump to the NBA as a one-and-done phenom.

But he returned to school only to take a step backward. Martin revealed after the season that Thornwell needed procedures on both knees because of chronic tendinitis. As a junior, he showed a different maturity, anchoring a team that tied a school record with 25 wins and was on the cusp of NCAA inclusion until Selection Sunday when they were relegated to the NIT.

But Thornwell's senior season hasn't been all smooth sailing, it was nearly waylaid by a six-game suspension. Martin said Thornwell violated athletic department policy, and it was later discovered the violation was being arrested last May for marijuana possession and driving with a suspended license. The Gamecocks went 3-3 during Thornwell's absence, which ended with the start of the new year.

# Westbrook notches 35th triple-double

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Add another first for Russell Westbrook — a triple-double without missing a shot.

Westbrook recorded his 35th triple-double of the season with 18 points, 11 rebounds and 14 assists and the Oklahoma City Thunder cruised to a 122-97 win over the Philadelphia 76ers on Wednesday night.

He did so while making all six of his field-goal attempts and all six of his free throws. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, no NBA player previously has had a triple-double without missing a shot attempt or free throw.

Westbrook's perfect shooting night could partially be attrib-

uted to a conscious decision to not shoot a three-pointer in a game for the first time since March 14, 2016. He said he wasn't aware during the game that he hadn't missed a shot.

"I was just trying to play, trying to take my time," Westbrook said. "I've been watching some film, trying to pick my spots better. I found ways to continue to get my teammates involved throughout the game and it just happened that way."

Westbrook needs six triple-doubles in Oklahoma City's final 11 games to tie Oscar Robertson's single-season record, set during the 1961-62 season.

**Wizards 104, Hawks 100:** Bradley Beal scored 28 points and John Wall added all 22 of

his in the second half to help host Washington over Atlanta.

Wall also had 10 assists on a night he shot just 6-for-21 from the floor, including two assists to Beal during a late 14-2 run that helped Washington ensure victory after Atlanta had led by as many as 12 early.

**Bucks 116, Kings 98:** Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points, 13 rebounds and six assists for visiting Milwaukee, which cruised to a victory over Sacramento.

The win moved the Bucks into a tie with Indiana for the sixth spot in the tight Eastern Conference playoff race.

**Nuggets 126, Cavaliers 113:** Wilson Chandler scored 18 points in his return from a pulled groin and provided stel-

lar defense on LeBron James in host Denver's victory over Cleveland.

**Celtics 109, Pacers 100:** Isaiah Thomas scored 25 points as Boston beat visiting Indiana for its fifth win in six games.

**Bulls 117, Pistons 95:** Nikola Mirotic scored a season-high 28 points as host Chicago beat Detroit.

**Hornets 109, Magic 102:** Kemba Walker scored 22 points and Marco Belinelli came off the bench to add 20 as visiting Charlotte pulled off a fourth-quarter comeback to defeat Orlando.

**Jazz 108, Knicks 101:** Rudy Gobert scored a career-high 35 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as Utah rallied to defeat visiting New York.

## Ladd's late goal helps Islanders rally past Rangers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After getting off to a slow start, the New York Islanders rallied with a strong third period to get a big win in their playoff push.

Andrew Ladd scored the tie-breaking goal with about 7½ minutes remaining to lift the Islanders to a 3-2 victory over the crosstown-rival Rangers on Wednesday night.

Anders Lee had a goal and an assist, and Nikolay Kulemin also scored for the Islanders, who pulled two points behind Boston for the Eastern Conference's second wild-card spot. Anthony Beauvillier had two assists and Thomas Greiss stopped 34 shots.

"We might not have had our best night, we just stuck with it, then found a way," said Islanders captain John Tavares, who had an assist on Ladd's winner. "I think that's what matters most. I think going forward, we just know we have to be a lot better in some areas. We just keep believing. There's still 10 games to go, and you play 82 for a reason."

On the tiebreaking goal, the Islanders were on the power

play when Tavares fired a shot from the left side that deflected to Lee at the left side of the net. Lee then sent a backhand pass in front to Ladd, who fired it past Raanta for his 20th with 7:22 to go.

Ladd, signed in the offseason, has rebounded nicely after a slow start that saw him total four goals and three assists in his first 32 games. He has 16 goals and five assists in 36 games since.

"It's always nice to get to that mark," Ladd said of getting No. 20, "Especially after the start that I had. But at this point, the good feeling is coming away with two points, and on to the next one."

For the Islanders, the next one is a visit to defending champion Pittsburgh on Friday night before hosting the Bruins the following night.

Mats Zuccarello and Rick Nash scored, and Antti Raanta finished with 25 saves for the Rangers, who remained six points behind Columbus for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

"We played a strong game," Rangers coach Alain Vigneault

said. "We had some real good looks. Defensively, we didn't give up much. We got a little unlucky, I thought, in the third period there as far as bounces on our (penalty kill)."

The Islanders, who beat the Rangers for the third time in four games this season and seven of eight over the last two, won for just the second time in six games (1-3-1). The Islanders also improved to 17-9-4 since interim coach Doug Weight replaced the fired Jack Capuano.

The loss extended the Rangers' home losing streak to seven games (0-5-2) since beating Washington on Feb. 19.

**Maple Leafs 5, Blue Jackets 2:** William Nylander and Leo Komarov each had a goal and an assist and visiting Toronto beat Columbus.

Auston Matthews and Nazem Kadri also scored, and Frederik Andersen had 32 saves as Toronto stayed in the thick of the playoff hunt in the Atlantic Division. Nikita Zaitsev scored an empty-net goal after the Blue Jackets pulled their goalie for a sixth skater near the end.

David Savard and Brandon Saad scored for Columbus,

which lost for the first time in the last five games. Backup goaltender Joonas Korpisalo stopped 26 shots. The Blue Jackets stayed in third place in the Metropolitan Division, two points behind leader Washington and one behind Pittsburgh. They play the Capitals in Washington on Thursday night.

**Ducks 4, Oilers 3:** Rickard Rakell scored the go-ahead goal, Hampus Lindholm had a goal and two assists, and host Anaheim defeated Edmonton.

Jonathan Bernier made 29 saves, and Josh Manson and Patrick Eaves also scored as Anaheim passed Edmonton for second place in the Pacific Division with nine games remaining for both teams.

Cam Talbot gave up four goals on 18 shots before being pulled midway through the second period as the Oilers' four-game winning streak ended. Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist, giving him 84 points to extend his league lead, and Leon Draisaitl also scored for the Oilers.

Mark Letestu added a 6-on-3 power-play goal with 6.7 seconds remaining.