

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Top politicians in Iraq decry airstrikes

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Senior Sunni Muslim politicians expressed concern Saturday over reports of airstrikes that allegedly have killed more than 100 civilians in western Mosul, where U.S.-backed government troops are fighting the Islamic State group.

It was unclear who carried out the airstrikes, but on Friday, the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria said it was investigating the allegations.

Residents reported two airstrikes hitting a residential area on March 13 and 17. The Iraqi Defense Ministry has provided no immediate comment.

In tweets published on his official account, parliament speaker Salim al-Jabouri said “we realize the huge responsibility the liberating forces shoulder” and call on them to “spare no effort to save the civilians.”

In a statement issued on his website, Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, himself from Mosul, described the incident as a “humanitarian catastrophe,” blaming the U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and excessive use of force by militarized Federal Police forces. Al-Nujaifi put the number of civilians killed at “hundreds.”

He called for an emergency parliament session and an immediate investigation into the

incident.

Residents of the neighborhood known as Mosul Jidideh told The Associated Press on Friday that scores of residents were believed to have been killed by two airstrikes that hit a cluster of homes in the area. Resident Ahmed Ahmed said there were over a hundred people within the cluster taking refuge from the missiles.

AP reporters saw on Friday at least 50 bodies being recovered from the wreckage of the buildings.

Faced with their toughest fight yet against the Islamic State group, Iraqi and coalition forces increasingly have turned to airstrikes and artillery to clear and hold territory

in western Mosul’s densely populated western neighborhoods. Civilians and humanitarian and monitoring officials are warning of increased civilian casualties in western Mosul due to the increased reliance on airstrikes and artillery.

Backed by U.S.-led international coalition, Iraqi forces launched an operation in February to drive the Islamic State group from the western half of Iraq’s second-largest city, after declaring eastern Mosul “fully liberated” the previous month. The city is divided by the Tigris River into western and eastern halves and the initial operation to liberate Mosul of the extremists began in October.

Coalition strikes complicated by human shields

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

QAYARAWESTAIRFIELD, Iraq — The missile was in mid-air, heading toward an Islamic State fighter, when he suddenly pulled a family from a nearby house as a shield.

“I just did not engage,” said Capt. Lucas Gebhart, pilot of the Apache attack helicopter that fired the missile. Gebhart recounted the incident at this base about 40 miles south of Mosul, where Iraqi forces are battling the extremists. “I just directed (the missile) to where it wouldn’t hit them.”

The procedure, called “shifting cold,” allowed Gebhart to prevent civilian casualties. That’s something U.S. troops, who are supporting Iraqi forces with precision-guided strikes, say they take great care to do, aided in part by pricey “smart munitions.”

As Iraqi forces push deeper into Mosul’s Old City of nar-

row streets and densely packed houses, the presence of an estimated 400,000 civilians likely will make avoiding noncombatant deaths more challenging. The risks were highlighted in a recent incident in which a strike could have set off massive truck bombs rigged by militants.

“The west side is very congested. It will present new challenges for us as we advance,” said Gebhart, commander of the 4th Squadron, 6th Cavalry’s Bravo Troop. “We have to be more careful as we get further.”

So far in the 5-month-old battle to oust the Islamic State fighters, who have held Mosul since 2014, U.S.-backed Iraqi forces have liberated the eastern half of the city, divided from the city’s western half by the Tigris River.

Troops began the advance on the western half last month and are nearing the Grand Mosque,

where the militants’ leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, proclaimed a global caliphate in 2014.

The Bravo Troop Apaches fly nearly daily missions, weather permitting, providing close-air support for Iraqi maneuvers and responding to situations in which coalition or Iraqi troops come under enemy fire. They also escort medical evacuation flights.

“I love my job,” said Gebhart, 32, wearing a dusty U.S. cavalry hat. He’s doing what he always imagined he’d do as an Apache pilot.

Since early December, his Apaches have been “a lot more engaged in supporting the Iraqis.” The unit has clocked more than 200 engagements against the militants since then — each one approved by Iraqi officials. As defined by the U.S.-led coalition, strikes may be made up of several engagements.

The enemy is bold and the fight is “very kinetic,” Gebhart

said, using a term favored by military officials to describe lethal violence. “We have shot a lot of car bombs as they have driven toward the Iraqis.”

But, using an Arabic acronym for the jihadi group, he said, “The Iraqis impressed me with their willingness to engage with Daesh.” U.S. officials say it’s only a matter of time before the militants are defeated.

Iraqi Brig. Gen. Yahya Rasoul claimed on Tuesday that Iraqi forces control nearly two-thirds of the city’s west and are a few hundred meters from the mosque, which he said is a significant landmark for the militants.

Iraqi forces plan to raise the country’s flag there soon, he said, but troops are advancing slowly to avoid unintended casualties — their first priority.

“It’s a hard fight with civilians inside,” Rasoul said. “We are trying to evacuate them.”

Navy SEAL loses rank, jailed for assaulting ex

NORFOLK, Va. — A Navy SEAL has been sentenced to 89 days' confinement for assaulting a female sailor he used to date.

A Navy press release said Friday that Stephen Varanko III will also lose his rank of chief special warfare operator. He will have a rank of petty officer 1st class.

Varanko was found guilty of aggravated assault and sexual harassment in Norfolk, Va., on Friday. He was found not guilty of rape and kidnapping charges.

The incident occurred in 2015 at a Kentucky hotel. The female sailor testified that Varanko held her captive, attacked and raped her. She claimed he was in a jealous rage over another man.

Guard Humvee stolen from armory in Ohio

STOW, Ohio — Authorities in Ohio are still on the hunt for a Humvee swiped from an Ohio National Guard Armory.

The State Highway Patrol said someone cut through a fence at the Ohio National Guard Armory in Stow and took the Humvee late Tuesday or early Wednesday.

Troopers said someone disabled the Humvee's locking mechanism.

The patrol said the Humvee is marked with bumper numbers 174 and 1-145 near the left tail light and HQ-51 on the right.

Man gets prison for selling stolen guns

WORCESTER, Mass. — A Boston man was sentenced to nearly five years in prison in connection with the sale of machine guns and handguns stolen from the U.S. Army Reserve Center in Worcester.

Tyrone James was sentenced Friday on charges of possession and sale of stolen firearms, conspiracy and lying to federal agents. James, 29, pleaded guilty in December.

Co-defendant James Morales is accused of breaking into a weapons vault and stealing 10 M-11 semi-automatic handguns and six M-4 Carbines in 2015.

From wire reports

Strikes in Syrian areas held by rebels kill, wound scores

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Warplanes struck rebel-held parts of Syria on Saturday, hitting a women's prison and a clinic, killing and wounding scores of people, amid clashes on multiple fronts between government forces and insurgent groups in some of the worst violence the country has witnessed in weeks, opposition activists said Saturday.

The airstrikes, of which some activists said included Russian air raids, concentrated on the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib, the central province of Hama and suburbs of the capital, Damascus, that have come under attack by insurgent groups over the past week.

One of the airstrikes hit a main street in the Damascus suburb of Hamouriyeh, killing at least 16 people and wounding more than 50, activists said. The airstrikes caused wide destruction in the area.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights

said the airstrikes killed 16, including eight women and children, and wounded more than 50. The Local Coordination said 18 were killed and dozens were wounded.

Both groups said some people are still missing, and that the death toll could rise.

The airstrikes come as insurgent groups have been on the offensive in Damascus and the central province of Hama in recent days. Government forces and their allies launched a counteroffensive, capturing some of the areas they lost in Damascus and Hama.

Opposition activists also reported airstrikes in Idlib province hitting several towns and villages as well as the provincial capital, which carries the same name.

The Observatory said a Friday night attack struck a prison run by militants, killing at least 16 people, including prisoners and prison staff, in Idlib city. It added that women were among

the dead as well.

The monitoring group, which has a network of activists around the country, said some people were killed by gunfire as prison guards chased detainees who tried to flee after the attack.

The Syrian National Coalition, one of the largest opposition groups, said the airstrikes on Idlib targeted, among other things, a women's prison, saying that dozens of people were killed or wounded.

The Observatory and the Syrian Civil Defense group said an airstrike struck a clinic in the village of Kfar Nubul in Idlib province. They had no immediate word on casualties.

The Local Coordination Committees said five air raids struck the city of Idlib without giving further details.

Idlib is a stronghold of Syrian insurgent groups and is targeted regularly by Syrian and Russian warplanes.

Air Force mourns 'trusted' airman

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

U.S. troops gathered at an undisclosed location in Southwest Asia on Thursday to mourn the death of a colleague they remembered as a kind friend, a loving wife and mother and a dedicated and driven professional.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Alexandria Mae Morrow, 25, of Dansville, N.Y., died Wednesday while performing maintenance duties in support of Operation Inherent Resolve combat operations, the Pentagon said this week. The incident is under investigation.

Morrow's mother, Stephanie Gleason, told New York's WHEC that the airman was loading a bomb onto a plane in Jordan

when something broke and the bomb slipped and hit Morrow in the head.

A flag at Dansville High School flew at half-staff Thursday to honor the seven-year veteran, who graduated in 2009 and aspired to be an art teacher after her Air Force service ended, the local news station reported.

Morrow — married and a mother of two young children — was assigned to the 366th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, and was deployed with the 332nd Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron, according to a statement posted on the Air Force Central Command website.

She had been deployed to Jordan in support of the anti-Is-

lamic State fight since October, her second deployment, WHEC reported.

"She was one of the kindest people many of us have ever known," said Lt. Col. Paul Tower, commander of the 332nd, according to the Air Force statement. "She was a loving wife to her husband, an amazing mother to her children, and our fellow warrior and friend — a friend who could be trusted in the toughest of times."

Known for her caring ways, she earned the nickname "Mother Alex" on the flight line and at her home station, where her professionalism quickly earned a leadership position after arriving at Mountain Home in 2010.

Effort to end ACA smothered

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans passed roughly 60 bills over the past six years dismembering President Barack Obama's health care overhaul, the Affordable Care Act. They knew the measures would go nowhere because the Democrat still lived in the White House.

With a bill that counted Friday, they choked. It was an epic, damaging, self-inflicted collapse that smothered the GOP effort.

The measure would have erased much of Obama's 2010 law, eliminating its unpopular requirement that people buy coverage, ending its Medicaid expansion and trimming federal assistance to people to help pay medical bills.

With President Donald Trump serving alongside a Congress controlled by the GOP, the bill was the party's first genuine opportunity to repeal Obama's statute. Ryan shelved it amid defections from centrist Republicans who thought it went too far and conservatives who considered it too weak, plus solid Democratic opposition.

Its rejection was fueled by nonpartisan congressional analysts concluding it would cause 24 million people to lose coverage in a decade and drive up costs for poorer and older people.

One problem facing the GOP is repercussions from the party's voters. For nearly a decade, they've heard countless Republican congressional candidates promise to repeal Obama's statute, a pledge that became a centerpiece of Trump's presidential campaign.

"It's a really good question," Ryan said, when asked how Republicans could face constituents. "I wish I had a better answer for you."

Democrats, loyal defenders of Obama's law, were literally jumping for joy. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., removed her shoes and took a victory leap while meeting activists outside the Capitol.

Obama's statute has spread coverage to 20 million people and required insurers to cover numerous services and barred them from refusing policies for the very sick.

UK attacker spent time in Saudi Arabia

Associated Press

LONDON — The man who killed four people outside Britain's Parliament was in Saudi Arabia three times and taught English there, the Persian Gulf country's embassy said.

Khalid Masood taught English in Saudi Arabia from November 2005 to November 2006 and from April 2008 to April 2009, a Saudi Embassy statement released late Friday said.

Masood had a work visa during those times and then returned for six days in March 2015 on a trip booked through a travel agent, the embassy said. Saudi security services didn't track him, and he didn't have a criminal record there.

Before taking the name Masood, he was known as Adrian Elms. He was known for having a violent temper in England and had been convicted at least twice for violent crimes.

Masood drove his rented SUV across the crowded Westminster Bridge on Wednesday, striking pedestrians. Then he jumped out and attacked police officer Keith Palmer, who was guarding the Parliament building, fatally stabbing him before being shot dead by police.

In all, he killed four people and left more than two dozen hospitalized, including some with what have been described as catastrophic injuries. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack.

British officials said security at Parliament will be reviewed after new footage emerged that showed large gates to the complex were left open after Masood rushed onto the grounds.

There are concerns accomplices could have followed him in and killed more people.

The new footage follows the release of earlier video showing slight delays and confusion during the evacuation of Prime Minister Theresa May from Parliament as the attack unfolded.

Colo. plan protects against pot crackdown

Associated Press

DENVER — Colorado is considering an unusual strategy to protect its nascent marijuana industry from a potential federal crackdown, even at the expense of hundreds of millions of dollars in tax collections.

A bill pending in the Legislature would allow pot growers and retailers to reclassify their recreational pot as medical pot if a change in federal law or enforcement occurs.

It's the boldest attempt by a marijuana state to avoid federal intervention in its weed market.

The bill would allow Colorado's 500 or so licensed recreational pot growers to instantly reclassify their weed. A switch would cost the state over \$100 million a year because Colorado taxes medical pot more lightly than recreational weed — 2.9 percent versus 17.9 percent.

The measure says licensed growers could immediately become medical licensees "based on a business need due to a change in local, state or federal law or enforcement policy." The change wouldn't take recreational marijuana off the books, but it wouldn't entirely safeguard it either. What it could do is help growers

protect their inventory in case federal authorities start seizing recreational pot.

The provision is getting a lot of attention in the marijuana industry following recent comments from members of President Donald Trump's administration. White House spokesman Sean Spicer has said there's a "big difference" between medical and recreational pot.

Sponsors of the bill call it a possible exit strategy for the new pot industry. It's hard to say how many businesses would be affected, or if medical pot would flood the market, because some businesses hold licenses to both grow and sell marijuana in Colorado.

The state had about 827,000 marijuana plants growing in the retail system in June, the latest available data. More than half were for the recreational market.

If federal authorities start seizing recreational pot, Colorado's recreational marijuana entrepreneurs "need to be able to convert that product into the medical side so they can sell it," said Sen. Tim Neville, a Republican who sponsored the bill.

His bill passed a committee in the Republican Senate 4-1 last week.

Skeptics of the proposal doubt the classification change would do much more than cost Colorado tax money.

Schools would be the first casualty of a tax change. Colorado sends \$40 million a year to a school-construction fund from excise taxes on recreational pot. It's a tax that doesn't exist for medical pot.

Other items funded by recreational pot in Colorado include training for police in identifying stoned drivers, a public-education campaign aimed at reducing teen marijuana use, and an array of medical studies on marijuana's effectiveness treating ailments such as seizures or post-traumatic stress disorder.

The proposal comes amid mixed signals from the federal government on how the Trump administration plans to treat states that aren't enforcing federal drug law.

Spicer said the president understands the pain and suffering many people, especially those with terminal diseases, endure "and the comfort that some of these drugs, including medical marijuana, can bring to them."

But Attorney General Jeff Sessions has voiced doubts about pot's medical value.

AFRICOM chief: Expand Somalia authority

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vowing he won't turn Somalia into a "free-fire zone," the commander of U.S. Africa Command said Friday he wants greater authority to conduct airstrikes and use military forces in the African country to allow the U.S. to strike al-Qaida-linked militants more quickly.

Marine Gen. Thomas Waldhauser said the White House hasn't yet approved the request. But he told reporters at the Pentagon the greater flexibility would help U.S. and Somali fighters combat al-Shabab extremists.

Last month, The Associated Press reported that senior defense leaders recommended

the expanded authorities to the White House. The proposed changes would allow U.S. special operations forces to increase assistance to the Somali National Army, even if that puts U.S. forces closer to the fight.

"It's very important and very helpful for us to have a little more flexibility, a little bit more timeliness, in terms of the decision-making process," Waldhauser said, saying the increased authorities would give the U.S. greater ability to strike al-Shabab and weaken the group.

The military would act appropriately, he said, adding, "We're not going to turn Somalia into a free-fire zone."

Al-Shabab was blamed for a suicide bombing that blew a hole

in a jetliner last year, forcing it to make an emergency landing in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. Officials have cited the incident in recent days as an example of a laptop-borne bomb after the U.S. barred computers and tablets from the cabins of some incoming flights from overseas. The bomber was the only person killed in the explosion.

Separately, Waldhauser declared the hunt for warlord Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, largely over. He said possibly thousands of Kony's fighters and most of his top lieutenants are now off the battlefield, leaving the leader "irrelevant" and in survival mode. He said the U.S. would help the region guard against an LRA resurgence.

On Somalia, Waldhauser dismissed suggestions that his request could lead to more civilian casualties in the struggling nation, where a devastating famine has uprooted citizens around the country. The military, he said, has already discussed and "war-gamed" the issue because so many people are moving around the battlefield in search of food and water.

Under current rules, U.S. troops in Somalia are largely restricted to defensive military measures.

His proposal would allow the U.S. to conduct offensive airstrikes and allow American forces to move along with Somali troops into the fight when needed, based on what commanders decide.

Small US force to stay in Libya

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Less than 200 Islamic State fighters remain in Libya but pose enough of a threat that the United States intends to retain a small special operations force in the troubled nation indefinitely, the U.S. Africa Command chief said Friday.

In the months since American B-2 Spirit stealth bombers pulverized the terrorist group's desert encampments south of the coastal city of Sirte on Jan. 18, Islamic State fighters have scattered farther into the desert, Marine Gen. Thomas Waldhauser told reporters Friday at the Pentagon. Small groups of the militants have maintained communication lines with one another, but they have not gathered in large groups since that assault, which the Pentagon estimated killed about 80 of them.

"They have not left," the general said of the Islamic State group. "We continue to watch, we continue to observe, to develop the intelligence. And if requested by ... the Government of National Accord (GNA) for assistance, we'll help them

with that."

The United States backed the GNA, which is the United Nations-recognized Libyan government, with air power for months as militia fighters supporting the GNA fought an urban battle with the Islamic State group in Sirte. U.S. warplanes and helicopters conducted more than 500 airstrikes that helped free Sirte from the terrorist group in December. The jihadi group had held the city — and more than 150 miles of Libya's Mediterranean coast — since early 2015 and had intended to establish a headquarters there for its African operations.

Waldhauser stopped short of providing a solid estimate on the Islamic State group's actual size within Libya, but he said it was fair to characterize their strength as between 100 and 200 fighters.

U.S. defense officials once estimated the terrorists boasted some 4,000 militants inside Libya. Waldhauser said Friday that he believes American estimates might have been low.

While the U.N. recognizes the GNA as the legitimate government of the nation, several

groups — including the Libyan National Army, whose leader, Khalifa Haftar, has recently established ties to Russia — continue to fight for governance.

"Anywhere you have a weak or unstable or no government, that's a breeding ground for [the Islamic State group]," Waldhauser said. "We must make sure our pressure on the network keeps those problems tamped down."

Thus, the United States will retain its small force of special operations teams in the country who are charged with intelligence gathering and maintaining contacts with militias that support the GNA, he said.

Waldhauser declined to say how many American troops are operating in Libya, as other defense officials have done previously.

"You have to have that there," Waldhauser said. "We are going to have to do to these things so that we can take out targets when they arise."

The ultimate way to defeat the Islamic State group, the general said, would be to align Libya's warring factions against the extremists through a political solution.

Tillerson to meet with NATO allies

Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will meet with NATO allies next week in Brussels, a move that could quell controversy over his earlier decision to skip a long-planned summit of the trans-Atlantic alliance.

The State Department said Friday that Tillerson added a stop at NATO headquarters in Brussels to a previously scheduled trip to the Turkish capital of Ankara.

Tillerson will be in Ankara on Thursday, where he will meet with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other senior Turkish officials to discuss the fight against Islamic State militants in Syria and to "reaffirm Turkey's important role in ensuring regional stability," the State Department said.

The next day, he will go to NATO, the State Department said. NATO officials were attempting to put together a session with the other 27 allied nations.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Prosecutors: Man drove over ex-wife four times

MA DEDHAM — Prosecutors in Massachusetts say a man ran over his ex-wife four times in the driveway of their Quincy home last year, killing her after they fought over his alleged gambling.

Yan Long Chow pleaded not guilty Thursday in Norfolk Superior Court to first-degree murder. He was ordered held without bail.

Prosecutors say Chow, 55, told police he accidentally hit Zhen Li, 52, in the driveway on Sept. 2. Li died at the scene.

Court documents say investigators learned the couple often fought over Chow's gambling.

Chow's lawyer, Scott Martin, told the Boston Globe his client had nothing to gain from Li's death.

Martin said Chow and Li married in 1985, divorced in 1993, remarried in 1998 and divorced again in 2005, but remained a couple.

Man gets 45 years for killing grandmother

IL GENEVA — A Texas man has been sentenced to 45 years in prison in Illinois for killing his grandmother for an inheritance.

Rich A. Schmelzer was convicted in December in the slaying of Mildred Darrington, 85, of suburban Chicago. He was sentenced Thursday by Kane County Judge Linda Abrahamson.

Prosecutors said Schmelzer traveled from Frisco, Texas, to set up an elaborate series of alibis before killing the woman in 2014.

Prosecutors say as co-executor of Darrington's estate and a beneficiary of her trust, Schmelzer started to transfer money from her credit cards. When he learned he stood to in-

herit about half of an \$800,000 estate, he plotted to return to the Chicago area to kill her.

Man charged yet again with stealing electricity

ME WALES — A Maine man has been arrested for the second time in over two months on charges he climbed a utility pole and used jumper cable clamps to steal electricity from a utility company for his home.

Maine State Police had received a tip that claimed Nicholas Gagne reconnected power cables from the pole to his Wales home. Authorities said a trooper watched Gagne, 36, climb the pole holding a Central Maine Power transformer on Thursday morning.

Authorities said Gagne saw the trooper, came down the pole and fled into an outbuilding. He eventually surrendered.

Gagne faces charges of theft and other offenses. He was first charged with stealing electricity on Jan. 16.

Man kills grandmother, leaves body on street

NY NEW YORK — Authorities in New York City said a 32-year-old man killed his grandmother, 70, and left her body wrapped in a bedsheet on a Brooklyn street.

Police said Joyce Spears' body also was wrapped in a carpet near her Crown Heights home at about 1:45 a.m. Thursday. An emergency medical services crew pronounced her dead at the scene.

Investigators said a blood-stained dumbbell and knife were found near the victim. An autopsy will be conducted to determine the cause of death, they said.

Police later arrested the woman's grandson, who shared a

Union Street apartment with his grandmother. He was charged with second-degree murder.

Garbage hauler cited for early collections

NE GRAND ISLAND — An owner of a trash-collection company has been cited for collecting Grand Island garbage too early in the morning.

The Grand Island Independent reported that Tommy Ummel Sr., who co-owns Heartland Disposal with his son, was twice cited for violating city ordinance. Court documents say a Heartland Disposal employee began collecting garbage in Grand Island before 5 a.m. on Jan. 19 and March 1.

The younger Ummel, Tommy Ummel Jr., said the company takes the infractions seriously: "We want to be a good member of the community."

He said that on one of those dates, the company driver thought he could start before 5 a.m. in a commercial area. In the other case, the driver simply started too early and has been reprimanded.

Strangely dressed man arrested for 'stickup'

TX GROVES — Police say a man clad in a leopard-print robe, black mask, orange Crocs, orange gloves and armed only with a hairbrush held up a McDonald's restaurant in Southeast Texas.

Gevondis Demond Joseph was arrested following a brief police chase shortly after the 5 a.m. Thursday holdup in Groves, about 20 miles southeast of Beaumont. The man, 29, of Port Arthur, is charged with aggravated robbery.

City Marshal Norman Reynolds Jr. said the man walked into the restaurant and demanded

money, giving the impression that the hairbrush in his robe pocket was a handgun.

Police said they recovered \$130 in cash from the man.

WWII-era grenade found at park destroyed

WA PORT TOWNSEND — Authorities have destroyed a World War II-era grenade that was found in the sand on a beach in Fort Worden State Park, near Port Townsend.

The Peninsula Daily News reported that an area resident found the grenade while walking on the beach March 19. The man didn't want to leave the grenade on the beach so he took it home and called 911 to report his finding.

The State Patrol Bomb Squad picked up the grenade and took it to be destroyed.

Fort Worden functioned as a military base through World War I and World War II.

Infested cat stuck in jar gives birth, euthanized

CA RIVERSIDE — A stray cat that got its head stuck in a peanut butter jar had to be euthanized, but not before it gave birth to a litter.

The Riverside Press-Enterprise reported that the cat, named Skippy by San Jacinto shelter workers, gave birth to four kittens, on Tuesday before she was euthanized.

Skippy was found Monday with her head stuck in a plastic peanut butter jar. A woman found the cat and called animal services Officer Carra Mathewson to cut the container off.

On Tuesday, shelter workers discovered Skippy was infested with maggots, had spots of dead tissue and was malnourished and dehydrated.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

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Florida stuns Wisconsin in overtime

Associated Press

NEW YORK — With 4 seconds left in overtime, Chris Chiozza took off with the ball, hoping to get to the hoop or find an open man. Instead, the Florida point guard stopped short right at the three-point line and let fly with a shot that will go down in Gators' history.

Chiozza's three-pointer swished in at the buzzer to send Florida to the East Regional final with an 84-83 victory over Wisconsin on Friday night in the most dramatic game of this NCAA Tournament.

"This is something for the rest of his life that he'll be remembered by," Florida coach Mike White said. "He made an unbelievable play."

Nigel Hayes had given the Badgers (27-10) a two-point lead with 4 seconds left on two free throws. With no timeouts, the Gators inbounded to Chi-

ozza and he took care of the rest for Florida (27-8), setting off a Swamp-like celebration at Madison Square Garden.

"I was going to pass, but I was really going to the rim. But they did a good job of bumping me and slowing me down, and that was the shot I had so I had to have that one," Chiozza said.

Hayes ended up chasing and that is no way to play defense.

"I need to do a better job of making him change directions. He's extremely quick with the ball and he was able to put it in one hand and kind of outrun me," Hayes said.

Wisconsin's Zak Showalter was set to be the star before Chiozza took it away. Showalter, a senior, forced overtime with a leaping three-pointer off one leg with 2.1 seconds left in regulation — pointing to Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers in the crowd

— as the Badgers wiped out a 12-point, second-half deficit in the last 4:15.

South Carolina 70, Baylor 50: At New York, Sindarius Thornwell scored 24 points and the seventh-seeded Gamecocks handed the third-seeded Bears their worst NCAA Tournament loss.

South Carolina (25-10) was in control from the middle of the first half on, mixing defenses and hustling all over the Madison Square Garden court to advance to the Elite Eight for the first time.

DJ Dozier and Chris Silva had 12 points each and Duane Notice added 11 for the Gamecocks.

Johnathan Motley had 18 points, 12 in the second half, for Baylor (27-8), which just couldn't get any offense going. The Bears missed 11 of their first 13 shots from the field and it didn't get a whole lot better

the entire game. They finished 17-for-56 from the field (30.4 percent), including 3-for-13 from three-point range.

South Carolina opened the second half on a 12-6 run to get the lead to 49-28. The largest lead was 63-41.

Baylor was able to close to 11 points but that was as tight as the game got.

The Gamecocks went on a 16-0 run that lasted 7:44 in the first half. They turned a 15-15 tie into a 31-15 lead with 2:50 left in the first half.

The Bears went 0-for-10 from the field and committed four turnovers in the run. South Carolina's biggest lead of the half was 37-20 on a three by Notice with 29 seconds to play. It was 37-22 at halftime.

The Bears shot just 25 percent from the field in the first half (8-for-32) and committed seven turnovers.

Kentucky moves into Elite Eight by rolling past UCLA

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — De'Aaron Fox credits some sticky Kentucky defense for the Wildcats' latest berth in a regional final.

Coach John Calipari begs to differ.

He points at Fox, the freshman guard who outplayed UCLA phenom Lonzo Ball with one of the best scoring nights in Kentucky's vaunted NCAA Tournament history.

Fox scored a career-high 39 points as Kentucky beat UCLA 86-75 Friday night in a showdown between two of college basketball's goliaths for a spot in the South Regional final.

"All I did at halftime was say: 'Guys. Are you watching this game?' and they said yeah," Calipari said. "I said; 'Ok good. You know we are playing through De'Aaron Fox. The rest of you take a back seat and play off of him.'"

Fox not only turned in the best NCAA scoring performance since Tayshaun Prince

had 41 against Tulsa in 2002, it was the best by a freshman in tournament history.

"I scored like the first eight points of the game, and after that I was like you know it's going to be a good night for me," Fox said.

The only No. 2 seed to advance to the Elite Eight, the Wildcats (32-5) won their 14th straight game. Now the NCAA's winningest program will play another of basketball's titans Sunday in top-seeded North Carolina, a 92-80 winner over Butler earlier Friday, with a trip to yet another Final Four on the line.

The third-seeded Bruins (31-5) still have the most national titles. Yet they leave their third Sweet 16 under coach Steve Alford short of the Elite Eight.

"We just got beat by a very good team that played very, very well tonight," Alford said.

Fans lustily booed Calipari in his first game in Memphis since leaving in April 2009 for the Wildcats. Calipari's latest crop of talented freshmen put

Kentucky into a regional final for the sixth time in seven years.

Malik Monk scored 21 points for Kentucky, and Dominique Hawkins added 11.

This was the fourth time these powerhouses have met in the past three seasons, and UCLA upset then-No. 1 Kentucky in Rupp Arena with a 97-92 win on Dec. 3.

Fox didn't play his best in that game, taking 20 shots to get 20 points. That wasn't a problem with Kentucky fans making the FedExForum as comfortable as Lexington. Fox scored the first eight points for Kentucky and was all over the court forcing turnovers or diving to the floor to force a jump ball.

He outplayed Ball, who finished with 10 points on 4-for-10 shooting before announcing he had played his final game for UCLA. Ball handed out eight assists but also had four turnovers.

Freshman TJ Leaf and Isaac Hamilton each had 17 points for UCLA.

Kentucky shut down the nation's top-scoring team, holding UCLA well below its average of 90.2 points a game and just a point off its season low.

"We really picked it up defensively," Fox said. "That's why we won. Not because of our scoring. That team averages like 90 points a game, and we held them to ... 15 less than their average."

Maybe it was nerves or so many freshmen, but Kentucky led 36-33 at halftime after a first half that wasn't close to the fast-paced pace expected.

By the second half, the Wildcats at least were running up and down the court.

Monk also started scoring. The Southeastern Conference player of the year had only seven points in the first half. He hit four of his first five shots, including a pair of threes, within the first five minutes of the second. He scored off the fast break, and his second three with 15:52 gave Kentucky a 50-44 lead.

Top-seeded UNC knocks off Butler

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — North Carolina expects strong offensive performances from junior leaders Justin Jackson and Joel Berry II, but Luke Maye provided an unexpected bonus.

Berry scored 26 points, Jackson had 24, but it was the first career double-double from Maye — 16 points and 12 rebounds — that helped set the tone early and send the top-seeded Tar Heels to a 92-80 victory over Butler in the NCAA Tournament on Friday night.

“He has the ability to shoot the ball. He has the ability to rebound the ball,” North Carolina coach Roy Williams said of the sophomore forward and former walk-on. “But the reason Luke is going to be successful is what he’s got in his brain and in his heart.”

Carolina, which reached the Elite Eight for the 27th time, will face Kentucky, who beat UCLA in Friday’s second South Regional.

Maye’s early jolt off the bench helped

Carolina (30-7) build a first-half lead to as many as 20 as the Tar Heels benefitted from accuracy, connecting on 54.4 percent of their shots while Butler was at 43.5 percent.

“We knew we were going to have to make some perimeter shots to give ourselves a chance,” Butler coach Chris Holtmann said. “They were going to give us some clean looks, and we were going to have to make them. We just didn’t.”

Andrew Chrabascz led the fourth-seeded Bulldogs (25-9) with 21 points and seven rebounds, while Kelan Martin finished with 16 points for Butler, which struggled shooting early and did not recover.

“We let them get into a rhythm, especially in the beginning,” Chrabascz said. “When you let a team like that feel good about themselves, it’s tough to get them out of that with how many talented guys they have on their team. And also they answered every run that we had.”

The Tar Heels broke out of the gate early, building a double-digit lead and

really weren’t threatened after halftime, although Butler did get within 10 at one point. Carolina, which let Arkansas claw back before defeating the Razorbacks 72-65 last weekend, weren’t going to let that happen again.

“We got by with very little room against Arkansas,” Jackson said. “We knew it was a game of runs. Butler is a good team, and they keep on coming at you. For us, we tried to stay focused and stay poised.”

Jenkins attends: Villanova’s Kris Jenkins, who made the three-pointer to defeat the Tar Heels in last year’s national championship game, was seated near the Carolina bench. Jenkins was cheering on his brother, senior guard Nate Britt. “Me, him and Nate are in a group chat together. We always laugh and stuff. He’s pretty close to most of us. I mean, he’s here supporting his brother, and we’re kind of like his brothers, too,” forward Kennedy Meeks said.

Dempsey’s hat trick lifts US to win

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Just before they walked onto the field for a critical World Cup qualifier, American players received a message from Bruce Arena.

“I have this copyrighted, but it was something to the effect of: first shot, first tackle, first goal,” the returning coach said. “I have T-shirt rights to that.”

Their response was emphatic, elders and youth alike.

Clint Dempsey came back from an irregular heartbeat at age 34 to score his second international hat trick, 18-year-old phenom Christian Pulisic had one goal and set up three others, and the U.S. routed Honduras 6-0 Friday night to get back in contention for an eighth straight World Cup berth.

“Three massive points,” captain Michael Bradley said. “No two ways about that.”

Surprise starter Sebastian Lletget got his first international goal in the fifth minute

after Pulisic’s shot deflected off the goalkeeper, Michael Bradley doubled the lead in the 27th and Dempsey scored off Pulisic’s perfectly weighted chip in the 32nd.

Finding room to maneuver in a central midfield role, Pulisic made it 4-0 just 12 seconds into the second half with his fourth international goal. Dempsey rounded the keeper to score following a feed from Pulisic in the 49th, and Dempsey got another on a 23-yard free kick in the 54th. With 55 international goals, Dempsey moved within two of Landon Donovan’s American record.

“I’m a fighter,” Dempsey said, “look for the opportunity to get out there and show that I should be around still.”

In its first competitive match since Arena replaced Jurgen Klinsmann, the U.S. moved from last to fourth in the final round of the North and Central American and Caribbean region, tied at three points with Honduras and with Trinidad

and Tobago but ahead on goal difference, Mexico leads with seven points, followed by Costa Rica with six and Panama with four.

The top three nations qualify for next year’s tournament in Russia, and the fourth-place nation advances to a playoff. With a victory at Panama on Tuesday, the Americans could move into the top three.

“If we get a result in Panama, things change fast,” midfielder Alejandro Bedoya said.

The U.S. had never before won a hexagonal game by more than three goals.

“This team is really strong mentally,” Pulisic said. “It shows good heart.”

The American Outlaws and the rest of the lively crowd of 17,729 loved every second of this long-awaited showing.

Gloom had descended upon the Americans in November when they opened the hexagonal with a 2-1 home loss to Mexico and a 4-0 wipeout at Costa Rica. The defeats caused the

U.S. Soccer Federation to fire Klinsmann, who had coached the Americans since 2011, and bring back Arena, who led the team from 1998-2006.

Dempsey was sidelined from August until this month by an irregular heartbeat and started only because of injuries to Bobby Wood and Jordan Morris.

“We didn’t have anyone else,” Arena said. “It made it easy for me.”

Tim Howard, the Americans’ 38-year-old goalkeeper, got his 38th shutout. He returned only two weeks ago from a leg injury sustained in the November loss to Mexico.

Arena admitted he decided weeks ago to play Pulisic in central midfield. With Fabian Johnson hurt, Arena started wide midfielders largely overlooked by Klinsmann: Lletget and Darlington Nagbe.

“It looked pretty,” Howard said. “Hopefully, we can keep that up.”

Suns' Booker scores 70 points in loss

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Phoenix Suns' Devin Booker scored 70 points, becoming the sixth player in NBA history to reach that total, but the Boston Celtics got 34 points from Isaiah Thomas and outlasted the visitors 130-120 on Friday night.

Booker joined Wilt Chamberlain, Kobe Bryant, David Thompson, David Robinson and Elgin Baylor as the NBA's 70-point scorers. Baylor also held the previous record against the Celtics with 64 points in Minneapolis for the Lakers on Nov. 8, 1959.

The win was Boston's third straight, and avenged its buzzer-beater loss in Phoenix earlier this month.

The rematch was dominated early by the Celtics as they hit

eight three-pointers during a 37-point second quarter to grow their lead as high as 26 points.

Cavaliers 112, Hornets 105: LeBron James had 32 points, 11 assists and nine rebounds, and Cleveland bounced back from its worst defensive outing of the season with a win over host Charlotte.

Kyrie Irving added 26 points and Kevin Love had 15 points and 12 rebounds as the Cavaliers snapped Charlotte's three-game winning streak and clinched the Central Division.

Charlotte was led by Kemba Walker, who had 28 points on five three-pointers.

Rockets 117, Pelicans 107: James Harden scored 38 points, including eight down the stretch, and tied a career high with 17 assists to help Houston

pull away from visiting New Orleans.

Bucks 100, Hawks 97: Greek star Giannis Antetokounmpo picked up his second straight double-double with 34 points and 13 rebounds as host Milwaukee held on to beat Atlanta.

Warriors 114, Kings 100: Stephen Curry had 27 points, seven rebounds and a season-high 12 assists to help Golden State beat visiting Sacramento.

Wizards 129, Nets 108: John Wall scored 22 points despite dealing with migraine headache symptoms earlier in the day, Bradley Beal added 19 points and host Washington cruised past Brooklyn to clinch a playoff spot.

Nuggets 125, Pacers 117: Nikola Jokic had 31 points,

17 rebounds and a big three-pointer to turn back a late Indiana rally as visiting Denver prevailed.

Magic 115, Pistons 87: Elfrid Payton had 14 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in his fourth triple-double of the season while Terrence Ross scored 18 points as Orlando routed visiting Detroit.

76ers 117, Bulls 107: Rookies Dario Saric and Shawn Long had career highs in scoring, leading Philadelphia over desperate host Chicago.

Lakers 130, Timberwolves 119 (OT): Jordan Clarkson had career highs of 35 points and eight three-pointers as Los Angeles rallied to beat visiting Minnesota and snap a six-game skid.

Halak returns to lead Islanders past Penguins in SO

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Embattled goaltender Jaroslav Halak is glad to be back and contributing to the New York Islanders' run to the playoffs.

Halak, after spending time in the American Hockey League, won for the first time since December when John Tavares scored in the shootout to lead the Islanders over the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 on Friday night.

"Anytime you win a game, it's always great," Halak said. "I think it's more special right now after being called up and playing my first game right now in this late stage of the season."

Anthony Beauvillier opened the shootout with a goal, and Tavares snapped a wrist shot past Marc-Andre Fleury in the next round. Sidney Crosby scored in the shootout for Pittsburgh, but Halak, making his first start since Dec. 29, stopped Phil Kessel and Nick Bonino.

"(Halak) was called on to make some big saves, especially in the shootout," Tavares said. "It was good to have him

back and great to see him come up and get rewarded."

Anders Lee scored his 28th goal of the season, while Brock Nelson got his 17th and Casey Cizikas his eighth for the Islanders, who moved into the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

New York is tied with Boston at 82 points, but the Islanders have a game in hand on the Bruins. The Islanders were last in the conference at one point, but now they have 18 wins in 31 games since Doug Weight was named interim coach on Jan. 17, replacing Jack Capuano.

Halak, a former All-Star, is back in the fold after making 37 saves on Friday. He got the nod one day after he was recalled from Bridgeport.

"He looked like Halak when we signed him two years ago," Weight said. "He got some things straightened out, he looked confident, he looked aggressive and I think the guys fed off it."

Crosby extended his NHL lead with his 42nd goal. He is five points behind Edmonton forward Connor McDavid for the NHL scoring lead.

Stars 6, Sharks 1: Adam Cracknell scored his first hat trick in seven NHL seasons and host Dallas handed San Jose its fifth straight loss.

Cracknell opened the scoring in the first period, capped a three-goal flurry in the second and beat goalie Aaron Dell on a short-handed breakaway in the third for his career-high 10th goal of the season.

The Sharks entered two points ahead of Anaheim and Edmonton in the Pacific Division despite their longest losing streak of the season. San Jose has been outscored 16-5 during the stretch.

Brett Ritchie, Jamie Benn and John Klingberg also scored for the Stars.

Dallas' Kari Lehtonen made 20 saves four nights after shutting out San Jose.

Ducks 3, Jets 1: Andrew Cogliano scored late in the second period and Jonathan Bernier made 17 saves as host Anaheim beat Winnipeg.

Corey Perry and Jakob Silfverberg also scored for Anaheim, which is now tied with San Jose for the lead in the Pacific Division with eight games

remaining for both teams. The Sharks lost 6-1 to Dallas, giving the Ducks renewed hope of winning the division title for the fifth season in a row.

Bernier's outstanding play in relief of John Gibson has been a big reason why the Ducks are in contention for another division banner, improving to 7-0-1 in his last eight games. They've won three straight overall.

Josh Morrissey scored a power-play goal and Michael Hutchinson made 32 saves for the Jets, who did not pick up a point in eight games this season against Anaheim, San Jose and Edmonton, the top three teams in the Pacific Division.

Lightning 2, Red Wings 1 (OT): Nikita Kucherov scored 3:28 into overtime to lift visiting Tampa Bay over Detroit.

Situated on the edge of the crease, Kucherov redirected a hard pass from Brayden Point into the net.

The Lightning are one point behind the Boston Bruins and New York Islanders for the final Eastern Conference wild card.