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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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More US forces joining fight for Mosul

By TARA COPP AND COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Additional forces from the 82nd Airborne Division have deployed to assist Iraq in the battle to retake Mosul from the Islamic State group as the U.S. military opened investigations into reports that an airstrike in the city killed civilians, the Pentagon said Monday.

The Pentagon, in a prepared news release, would say only that an “unspecified number” of additional troops from the division’s 2nd Brigade Combat Team were sent from the U.S. to provide additional advisory-and-assistance support to Iraqi forces in the Mosul offensive.

The newly deployed elements of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team include two infantry companies and one route-clearance platoon, according to a defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. They join 1,700 troops from the same Fort Bragg, N.C.-based brigade combat team who deployed in November on a nine-month rotation in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. Overall, the brigade combat team is providing artillery and intelligence support and is embedded with Iraqi fighting units as Iraq’s forces battle an estimated 2,000 Islamic State fighters who remain in Mosul’s western half.

About 2,500 troops from the same unit remain at Fort Bragg and are “available if needed,” the defense official said.

The U.S. is authorized to have 5,262

troops in Iraq and 503 in Syria, but military officials can send servicemembers into both countries on short-term assignments, which are not included in the mandated troop limits. The temporary deployments can last up to 120 days.

The military has refused to say precisely how many troops are deployed to either country, however it is believed more than 6,000 U.S. troops are now operating in Iraq and nearly 1,000 in Syria.

The deployment of the additional forces comes as the escalation of U.S. troops against the Islamic State group in western Mosul, a densely populated urban area, has begun to draw questions whether a more aggressive stand against the terrorist organization has led to an increase in civilian deaths. A March 17 airstrike that eliminated a bomb-laden truck in Mosul might have killed scores of civilians, according to news reports.

U.S. Central Command has launched a preliminary investigation into that strike and others spanning a 10-day period beginning March 16. The military has yet to determine whether the March 17 strike killed civilians, Air Force Col. John Thomas, a CENTCOM spokesman, told reporters Monday at the Pentagon.

Thomas said investigators are looking through 700 videos of U.S. airstrikes in western Mosul during the time period to help determine whether there is evidence civilians were killed. He said the assess-

ment is a high priority and anticipated it would last two to three weeks. If evidence is found, an official investigation into the incident would then be launched.

“We need to take the appropriate time to get this right,” Thomas said. “... We are not jumping to any conclusions.”

The airstrikes were conducted in support of Iraqi security forces actively engaged against Islamic State fighters, he said. Despite the uptick of claims that U.S. strikes killed civilians in recent weeks, including allegations that two separate American strikes in Syria killed noncombatants, Thomas said the military is not considering a change to how it approaches the strikes.

He declined to discuss targeting procedures or the rules of engagement Monday.

Thomas reiterated the U.S. military uses “very precise” weapons and only engages “legitimate military targets.” Nonetheless, he said, western Mosul is densely packed with thousands of civilians amid “ferocious, door-to-door fighting” and vowed the U.S. and Iraqi forces would do all they could to avoid killing them.

“There is no military force in the world that has proven more sensitive to civilian casualties,” Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Monday at the Pentagon. “We go out of our way to always do everything that is humanly possible to reduce the loss of life or injury among innocent people. The same cannot be said for our adversaries.”

White House mulls more involvement in Yemen conflict

The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has asked the White House to lift Obama-era restrictions on U.S. military support for Persian Gulf states engaged in a protracted civil war against Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen, according to senior Trump administration officials.

In a memo this month to national security adviser H.R. McMaster, Mattis said that “limited support” for Yemen operations being conducted by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — including a planned Emirati offensive to retake a key Red Sea port — would help combat a “com-

mon threat.”

Approval of the request would mark a significant policy shift. U.S. military activity in Yemen until now has been confined mainly to counterterrorism operations against al-Qaida’s affiliate there, with limited indirect backing for Gulf state efforts in a 2-year-old war that has yielded significant civilian casualties.

It also would be a clear signal of the administration’s intention to move more aggressively against Iran. The Trump White House, in far stronger terms than its predecessor, has echoed Saudi and Emirati charges that Iran is training, arming and

directing the Shiite Houthis in a proxy war to increase its regional clout against the Gulf’s Sunni monarchies.

The administration is in the midst of a larger review of overall Yemen policy that is not expected to be completed until next month.

But the immediate question, addressed by Mattis’ memo and tentatively slated to come before the principals committee of senior national security aides this week, is whether to provide support for a proposed UAE-led operation to push the Houthis from the port of Hodeida, through which humanitarian aid and rebel supplies pass.

Vets return for Iwo Jima anniversary

BY JESSICA BIDWELL

Stars and Stripes

IWO JIMA, Japan — Francis Jackson was told he likely wouldn't survive the attack on Iwo Jima as Marines prepared for one of World War II's bloodiest battles.

"You will probably all be killed, but let's take two of them with you," Jackson's platoon leader told his men the night before they hit the beach on the heavily fortified island in 1945.

Eight U.S. veterans of the battle, which claimed the lives of nearly 30,000 men, returned to the island now called Iwo To on Saturday to mark the 72nd anniversary of its capture.

The event at the foot of Mount

Suribachi, on which six Marines were photographed raising the American flag on Feb. 23, 1945, included Japanese veterans and families of those killed.

Jackson, a Marine radio operator who was just 18 when he fought at Iwo Jima, said his family encouraged him to return.

Jackson said he wasn't scared during the wartime beach landing, but he thought about his platoon leader's warning that he'd probably be killed.

"We came to do a job, and when I was told to do something, I did it regardless ... I operated the radio for 63 straight hours," he said.

Norman Smith, a retired Marine who attended the ceremony, said those who fought at Iwo

Jima were a fine example for both nations.

"We must forever revere and emulate their courage, now more than ever, as our two countries bridge the Pacific Ocean at a dangerous time, in a dangerous world," he said.

Lt. Gen. David Berger, commander of Marine Forces Pacific, told those gathered for the ceremony, "We have learned from this epic battle. We have moved ahead together as an alliance, serving shoulder to shoulder around the world."

Japanese Defense Minister Tomomi Inada, also at the ceremony, echoed the comment.

"Enemies that had fought each other so fiercely have now become friends bonded in spir-

it," she said. "I am deeply moved by how we have become the strongest of allies, and that we can hold this reunion of honor ceremony under the auspices of such a firm alliance."

Iwo Jima was "a harrowing battle, one fought with fierce desperation rarely seen in the history of war," Tetsuro Tera-moto, president of the Japanese Iwo-To Association, said during the ceremony.

"I am deeply concerned that the memory of the historical battle of Iwo [Jima] is gradually fading, but we have a responsibility to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to passing our memories to the following generations in order to not repeat such a tragic battle."

Navy artists capture military history on canvas

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

Camera in hand, Navy artist Morgan Wilbur got into a small boat and went over the side of the USS Mustin during a man-over-board drill in 2014.

While sailors focused on manning the small craft and recovering a human-like dummy, Wilbur waited to capture the perfect moment — a nexus of swells, crystal-blue seas and skies, sailors with brows furrowed in concentration and the guided-missile destroyer in the background.

He waited and waited. Then it all came together. His camera flashed.

"For an artist, it's like gold," said the former Navy reservist, reminiscing about the scene he's now using as the basis of an oil painting. "It was just tremendous. And I knew it at the time. I was watching it saying, 'This is just incredible.'"

Wilbur, 53, of Virginia Beach, Va., is an artist with Naval History and Heritage Command's Combat Art Program. Since World War II, its sailors have been deploying with paints and brushes to tactfully record U.S. naval history.

Wilbur is putting the finishing touches on the Mustin painting. Once it is finished, he will reach out to the sailors in the shot to show them his work. The artwork will then be immortalized in the Navy Art Collection, which holds more than 20,000 paintings, prints, drawings and engravings.

The Combat Art Program was born in 1941 after a muralist cornered Adm. Chester Nimitz during a Naval Academy football game, according to Gale Munro, head curator of the Navy Art Collection. The muralist, Griffith Baily Coale, persuaded the admiral to send artists into the field with military units. Seven active-duty artists, including Coale, captured scenes from every major naval operation throughout World War II.

Since then, the program has covered every major American military conflict. Along the way, the Navy began sending artists out to document noncombat naval activities.

Wilbur began contributing paintings to the Navy's collection in the 1990s while working as art director for Naval Aviation News magazine. After a few years, the Navy brat who was taught to draw and paint by his Navy pilot father began to deploy.

In 2002, Wilbur documented Operation Enduring Freedom from the nuclear-powered supercarrier USS John C. Stennis. He began focusing on sailors after his first trip to Iraq in 2003 and a visit to a Navy field hospital where he witnessed surgeries.

"I try to concentrate on people," he said. "I still do the ships and the planes, but it's painting the people I get to meet and observe that gives me the most satisfaction."

He began painting for the Navy full time about four years ago. Navy artists deploy about once a year. The program employs two artists — Wilbur and Kristopher J.

Battles, 49, a former Marine sergeant and transplant from its combat-art program.

Wilbur's process usually starts with photographs, but he also does rough sketches and takes detailed notes. That can come in handy in darker situations where taking a photo isn't practical.

Wilbur and Battles said they are given nearly total artistic freedom, a surprising aberration in the highly structured and rigid military world. They are free to challenge each other and to experiment with different concepts and artistic styles. Wilbur usually paints the scenes verbatim, but some works are totally conceptual. For example, he painted a cloud formation that looked like a dragon above the USS George Washington leaving Yokosuka, Japan, in 2015.

"I feel very lucky that we have such artistic freedom," Wilbur said. "We have a good idea of what the art collection needs as far as the Navy but we have total freedom over what we paint."

Battles called the job a dream come true. "When we're long gone, this will be part of the Navy Art Collection and people can look back and say this is what it was like in 2016, 2017; that's what it was like back in the war on terror, or whatever," he said. "It's a great feeling."

Munro said the art program will continue into the future.

"The Navy is moving forward at a rapid pace," he said. "We just want to keep up" with documenting the progress.

Nunes met source on White House grounds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes met on the White House grounds with the source of the claim that communications involving President Donald Trump's associates were caught up in "incidental" surveillance, the congressman's spokesman said Monday.

The meeting occurred before Nunes disclosed at a news conference that U.S. spy agencies may have inadvertently cap-

tured Trump and his associates in routine targeting of foreigners' communications.

"Chairman Nunes met with his source at the White House grounds in order to have proximity to a secure location where he could view the information provided by the source," Nunes spokesman Jack Langer said.

Previously, Nunes, R-Calif., would not say where he met his secret source. He has still not revealed who that source is.

Nunes' connection to the White House has raised concerns that his committee's in-

vestigation is not a bipartisan, independent probe. He was a member of Trump's transition team, as well.

The White House was asked repeatedly last week about whether it was the source of Nunes' information. On Thursday, White House spokesman Sean Spicer mocked the idea, suggesting it didn't pass "the smell test."

"I don't know why he was coming up to brief the president on something that we gave him," Spicer told reporters.

Nunes' office said the infor-

mation provided to the chairman came from "executive branch documents that have not been provided to Congress."

"Because of classification rules, the source could not simply put the documents in a backpack and walk them over to the House Intelligence Committee space," Langer said. "The White House grounds was the best location to safeguard the proper chain of custody and classification of these documents, so the chairman could view them in a legal way."

Dems force 1-week delay on panel vote on Gorsuch

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats on Monday forced a one-week delay in a committee vote on President Donald Trump's Supreme Court nominee, who remains on track for confirmation with solid Republican backing.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, announced that, as expected, Democrats have requested a postponement. The committee vote on Judge Neil Gorsuch now will be held April 3.

At least 15 Democrats and independents, led by Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, of New York, have announced their opposition to the Denver-based appeals court judge, arguing that Gorsuch has ruled too often against workers and in favor of corporations.

Several Democrats have expressed frustration with the lack of answers Gorsuch gave during two lengthy days of questioning at his confirmation hearing last week. They also expressed concerns that he wouldn't be an independent voice from Trump, who nominated him in January.

But the nominee is supported by all Republican senators, and the GOP has a 52-48 majority. Republicans praised Gorsuch's testimony, saying he showed

humility and a deep understanding of legal precedent and separation of powers.

"Before the hearing started we all knew how qualified the judge is. His resume speaks for itself," Grassley said. "But last week we got to see up-close how thoughtful, articulate, and humble he is. He is clearly deeply committed to being a fair and impartial judge. And he isn't willing to compromise that independence to win votes in the Senate."

Democrats criticized Gorsuch for declining to give his personal views on most any issue. California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, the top Democrat on the Judiciary panel, also noted at the brief meeting Monday the "depth of feeling" among Democrats after Republicans blocked former President Barack Obama's nominee for the same seat, Merrick Garland. Within hours of Justice Antonin Scalia's death in February 2016, Republicans said they wouldn't take up Obama's eventual choice, saying the next president should have the say.

The Democrats who have announced their opposition have also said they will try to block the nominee, meaning Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., will have to hold a procedural vote requiring 60 votes to move forward.

Schumer seizes on Trump offer to work with Dems

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's aides opened the door to working with moderate Democrats on health care and other issues while Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer quickly offered to find common ground with Trump for repairing former President Barack Obama's health care law.

Schumer said Sunday that Trump must be willing to drop attempts to repeal his predecessor's signature achievement, warning that Trump was destined to "lose again" if he remained beholden to conservative Republicans.

Trump initially focused the blame for the failure on Democrats and predicted a dire future for the current law. But on Sunday he turned his criticism toward conservative lawmakers for the failure of the Republican bill, complaining on Twitter, "Democrats are smiling in D.C. that the Freedom Caucus, with the help of Club For Growth and Heritage, have saved Planned Parenthood & Ocare!"

On Sunday, Trump aides made clear that the president could seek support from moderate Democrats on upcoming legislative battles ranging from the budget and tax cuts to health care. Whether he would

work to repair Obama's health care law was a big question.

White House chief of staff Reince Priebus scolded conservative Republicans, explaining Trump had felt "disappointed" with a "number of people he thought were loyal to him that weren't."

"It's time for the party to start governing," Priebus said. "I think it's time for our folks to come together, and I also think it's time to potentially get a few moderate Democrats on board as well."

As he ponders his next steps, Trump faces decisions on whether to back administrative changes to fix Obama's health care law or undermine it as prices for insurance plans rise in many markets. Over the weekend, the president tweeted a promise of achieving a "great healthcare plan" because Obamacare will "explode."

Priebus did not answer directly regarding Trump's choice, saying that fixes to the health law will have to come legislatively and he wants to ensure "people don't get left behind."

Schumer, of New York, said Trump is "going to have to tell the Freedom Caucus and the hard-right special wealthy interests who are dominating his presidency ... he can't work with them, and we'll certainly look at his proposals."

Police: No militant link to London attack

Associated Press

LONDON — Police have found no evidence that the man who killed four people in London last week was associated with the Islamic State group or al-Qaida, a senior British counterterrorism officer said Monday.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, of the Metropolitan Police, said Westminster attacker Khalid Masood clearly had “an interest in jihad,” but police have no indication he discussed his attack plans with others.

Basu, who also serves as Britain’s senior national coordinator for counterterrorism policing, said Wednesday’s attack — in which Masood ran down pedestrians on London’s Westminster Bridge before fatally stabbing a policeman guarding Parliament — “appears to be based on low-sophistication, low-tech, low-cost techniques copied from other attacks.”

Masood was shot dead by police after his deadly rampage,

which police have revealed lasted just 82 seconds.

Police believe Masood — a 52-year-old Briton with convictions for violence who had spent several years in Saudi Arabia — acted alone, but are trying to determine whether others helped inspire or direct his actions.

Detectives on Monday continued to question a 30-year-old man arrested Sunday and a 58-year-old man arrested shortly after Wednesday’s attack. Both were detained in the central England city of Birmingham, where Masood had recently lived.

Prime Minister Theresa May said last week that Masood was “a peripheral figure” in an investigation into violent extremism some years ago. But Basu said he was not a “subject of interest” for counterterrorism police or the intelligence services before last week’s attack.

Masood was born Adrian Elms, but changed his name in 2005, suggesting a conversion to Islam. Basu said there was no sign Masood was radical-

ized during one of his stints in prison, the last of which was in 2003.

As Basu appealed for anyone who spoke to Masood on the day of the attack to come forward, the British government repeated calls for tech companies to give police and intelligence services access to encrypted messages exchanged by terrorism suspects.

Masood used the messaging service WhatsApp just before he began his attack. Home Secretary Amber Rudd said Sunday that such services must not “provide a secret place for terrorists to communicate with each other.”

Tech companies have strongly resisted previous calls to create back-doors into encrypted messaging, arguing that to do so would compromise the secure communications underpinning everything from shopping to tax returns to online banking.

Rudd is due to hold a previously scheduled meeting with internet companies on Thursday.

Prime Minister Theresa

May’s spokesman, James Slack, said tech firms “should be helping us more” to prevent terrorism.

“The ball is now in their court,” he said.

Slack said that if agreement was not reached with the companies, the government “rules nothing out,” including legislation.

Meanwhile, the families of the dead and injured set about the difficult task of going on with their lives.

The family of an American victim expressed gratitude Monday for the kindness of strangers as they insisted some good would come from the tragedy. A dozen members of Kurt W. Cochran’s family gathered to face the media, sharing their shock and sense of loss.

Cochran, from Utah, was on the last day of a European trip celebrating his 25th wedding anniversary when he was killed on Westminster Bridge. Cochran’s wife, Melissa, suffered a broken leg and rib and a cut head, but is steadily improving.

Arrest of ousted S. Korean leader urged

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean prosecutors said Monday they want to arrest former President Park Geun-hye over the corruption allegations that triggered a huge political scandal and toppled her from power.

The move comes after prosecutors grilled Park for 14 hours last week over suspicions that she colluded with a jailed confidante to extort from companies and committed other wrongdoing when she was in office.

The Seoul prosecutors’ office said in a statement that it asked a local court to issue an arrest warrant for Park. The Seoul Central District Court said it would hold a hearing Thursday to decide on the prosecutors’ request.

The court is expected to ask Park to attend the hearing, and its decision on her fate will likely come by Friday, according to

court officials.

An arrest is the next step before Park can be formally charged with crimes such as extortion, bribery and abuse of power. A bribery conviction alone is punishable by up to life in prison.

Park has denied any legal wrongdoing.

Even if the court dismisses the request, prosecutors can still indict and charge her. Prosecutors said Park’s alleged crimes were “grave,” and that she should also be arrested because her alleged accomplice, confidante Choi Soon-sil, and other suspects in the scandal have been arrested.

Political analysts have said arresting Park would boost tensions and create a backlash from her conservative supporters ahead of an election in May to choose her successor. While in office, Park had presidential immunity from prosecution and had refused to meet with

prosecutors.

Prosecutors accuse Park of conspiring with Choi and a top presidential adviser to pressure 16 business groups, including Samsung, to donate 77.4 billion won, or \$69 million, to two nonprofits that Choi controlled and allegedly used for personal profit. The companies told investigators they couldn’t refuse because they feared business disadvantages such as government tax investigations.

Prosecutors believe the money Samsung gave Choi could qualify as bribes provided to Park. They also accuse Park of conspiring with Choi and top officials to blacklist artists critical of her policies and deny them state financial support.

Park has apologized for putting trust in Choi but said she only let her edit some of her presidential speeches and provide the president with some “public relations” help.

Moscow court jails opposition leader

MOSCOW — Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who organized a wave of nationwide protests against government corruption that rattled authorities, was jailed for 15 days on Monday by a Moscow court for resisting police orders.

Navalny, 40, was arrested Sunday as he walked to a protest in Moscow and spent the night in jail before appearing in court.

Tens of thousands of anti-corruption protesters took to the streets across Russia on Sunday in the biggest show of defiance since 2011-12 anti-government protests. President Vladimir Putin’s spokesman on Monday chided opposition organizers for putting people’s lives at risk in the unauthorized protests and defended the actions of Russia’s helmeted riot police, which critics called heavy-handed.

From The Associated Press

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Airline wheels elderly couple to wrong flight

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A 96-year-old woman and an 89-year-old man were wheeled to the wrong gate at a South Florida airport and ended up on a flight to upstate New York instead of Michigan.

Helen Wheeler and her husband, George Nobel, ended up in Ogdensburg, N.Y., instead of Grand Rapids, Mich., after being put on the wrong Allegiant Air flight on Wednesday at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

South Florida television station WPLG reported that Allegiant Air spokeswoman Hilarie Grey blamed a malfunctioning boarding-pass scanner for not catching the mix-up. Grey apologized for the mistake and said the couple have been given a full refund.

The couple flew back to Fort Lauderdale and planned to try again.

Suspected 'Incognito Bandit' is arrested

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts man dubbed the "Incognito Bandit" has been arrested and charged with bank robbery as he tried to board a flight to South Africa from Virginia.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Massachusetts said Albert Taderera, 36, was arrested Friday evening at Washington Dulles International Airport. The Brighton man was charged with robbing a branch of TD Bank in Wayland on Oct. 7. He's also suspected in the robberies of more than a dozen other banks in the Metro-West and Greater Boston areas.

In most cases, prosecutors said, the robber was disguised

wearing a dark-hooded sweatshirt, a dark face mask, sunglasses, dark gloves and other dark clothing. The robber often would display a black, semi-automatic handgun.

Man made up as Joker faces mask charge

VA WINCHESTER — Police in Virginia have arrested a man dressed as comic book villain the Joker and charged him with wearing a mask in public.

Winchester Police Department spokeswoman Jennifer Hall said in a news release that the department got several 911 calls Friday afternoon reporting a man made up as Batman's nemesis who was wearing a cape and carrying a sword.

Jeremy Putman, 31, is charged with wearing a mask in public, a felony that can result in a sentence of a year in jail.

48 arrested in bust of heroin trafficking ring

WV MARTINSBURG — West Virginia authorities say 48 people were arrested in a drug bust that dismantled a heroin trafficking network in the Eastern Panhandle.

The (Martinsburg) Journal reported that the drug-trafficking network spanned across the Eastern Panhandle and surrounding states. The arrests were announced Friday by the Eastern Panhandle Drug & Violent Crime Task Force.

Prosecutors in Jefferson and Berkeley counties said the arrests began early Friday.

Jefferson County Prosecutor Matthew L. Harvey said the drugs were coming from Baltimore and were being distributed by the local drug ring.

Police union chief relieved of duty

FL MIAMI — The head of Miami's police union has been relieved of duty with pay after a woman received a restraining order against him.

Javier Ortiz was told Friday that he can still perform administrative duties as the police union chief but he can't take part in any police activities.

The Miami Herald reported that Claudia Castillo received a restraining order against Ortiz on Wednesday. Castillo said Ortiz has been harassing her on social media after she had a run-in with another police officer.

Ortiz has a chance in April to get his post back at a hearing.

Lawyer: Test clears ex-chief of murder

AR HOT SPRINGS — An attorney says a DNA sample ordered in the first-degree murder case of a man charged with killing a police dispatcher excludes an ex-Hot Springs police chief.

A judge ordered the sample from former chief David Flory, responding to a motion by attorneys for the man who goes on trial this week.

Kevin Conway Duck is charged in the death of his girlfriend, Hot Springs Village police dispatcher Dawna Natzke.

Duck's attorneys alleged that the ex-chief "had a relationship" with Natzke and asked that DNA found on her clothing be compared to Flory's.

John Wesley Hall, Flory's attorney, called the motion "a fishing expedition," and said he filed a motion Friday to have the DNA purged as soon as tests at the state Crime Laboratory confirmed Flory was excluded.

Woman blames crash on sasquatch sighting

ID MOSCOW — A northern Idaho woman told police she crashed into a deer because she was distracted by a sasquatch in her rearview mirror.

The Moscow-Pullman Daily News reported that the 50-year-old Tensed woman was driving south on U.S. Highway 95 on Wednesday when she struck a deer near Potlatch.

The woman told Benewah County Sheriff's officials that she saw a sasquatch chasing a deer on the side of the road while driving. She said she checked one of her mirrors to get a second look at the beast and when she looked up, the deer ran in front of her.

Sheriff's officials marked the incident as a vehicle-versus-deer collision but did not report any evidence of Bigfoot.

Fireworks business failed to report theft

PA PITTSBURGH — A 124-year-old Pennsylvania fireworks business is set to plead guilty to failing to report more than 63,000 fireworks that were apparently stolen.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has already fined Zambelli International Fireworks \$200,000 and ordered the company to close for two weeks. Those penalties were announced in January.

On Monday, company representatives were scheduled to plead guilty to a single count of failure to report the loss of explosive material. The New Castle company could be put on probation.

From wire reports

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Maye's shot lifts Tar Heels over Kentucky

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Roy Williams went all “Gone With the Wind” when a player asked about his North Carolina Tar Heels making the last shot Sunday to edge Kentucky to the Final Four.

And the coincidence that the Tar Heels have been on the other end of similar shots recently, like in the 2016 national championship and a wild December game against the Wildcats.

“Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a ...,” Williams said with a smile, quoting Clark Gable’s famed line as Rhett Butler. “I didn’t care what he was talking about.”

Luke Maye hit a jumper with 0.3 seconds left and top-seeded North Carolina held off Kentucky 75-73 to earn the Tar Heels’ second straight trip to the Final Four, winning a showdown of college basketball’s elite in the South Regional.

The national semifinal will be the 20th for North Carolina, where the Tar Heels (31-7) will play Oregon on Saturday in Glendale, Ariz.

North Carolina took control

with 12 straight points over the final 5 minutes, a run similar to what it used a week ago to beat Arkansas. The Tar Heels finished this game with a 16-9 run. Kentucky’s freshmen De’Aaron Fox hit a three and Malik Monk quickly added two more, one with 7.2 seconds left and defenders in his face to tie the game at 73.

“I probably should have called time out,” Kentucky coach John Calipari said. “It entered my mind, but they got that son of a B in so quick, I couldn’t get to anybody to do it. I needed to stop that right there.”

Theo Pinson drove enough toward the basket to pick off Maye’s defender, then passed back to Maye. The sophomore from Huntersville, N.C., knocked it down for the win with his feet on the three-point line.

“I just kind of stepped back, and he gave me the ball and I just shot it, and luckily it went in,” Maye said. “It was a great feeling.”

Maye finished with a career-high 17 points off the bench for

North Carolina. Justin Jackson scored 19 points, and Joel Berry II added 11 on a sprained left ankle.

The Wildcats had one last chance, but Derek Willis’ inbounds pass went out of bounds on the far end.

Kentucky (32-6) will miss out on the Final Four for the second straight year. Willis and sophomore Isaac Humphries left the court with towels over their heads, and Fox was the last to leave.

The Wildcats had hoped their talented freshmen would carry them. Bam Adebayo and Fox each had 13 points, and Monk, the Southeastern Conference player of the year, finished with 12. Fox and Adebayo wept side by side in the locker room.

“That shot is just playing back and forth in my head,” Fox said. “It’s going to be difficult to get over.”

Never before had the NCAA Tournament pitted powerhouse programs that have so dominated March. This South final featured Kentucky with the most tournament wins all-time with 124 and North Carolina

just behind with 120 (now 121).

This was just the fourth time these blue bloods have met in a regional final. The result was much the same as the others, with North Carolina now 3-1 against Kentucky.

Kentucky led for less than 4 minutes in a game North Carolina had a big edge on the boards (44-34) and inside, where the Tar Heels outscored the Wildcats 34-26.

Officials didn’t help the flow of this game calling fouls left and right, though Kentucky took the brunt with its star trio of freshmen all picking up two fouls each in the half. Fox played only 8 minutes of the first half after picking up his second foul with 12:23 left. Adebayo easily was the most frustrated as he missed all five shots in the half with Kennedy Meeks swatting away one of his dunk attempts.

North Carolina led by as much as 9 a couple times before both teams went into shooting slumps. The Tar Heels led 38-33 at halftime.

South Carolina headed to first Final Four

Associated Press

NEW YORK — South Carolina added a missing piece to its rich basketball history.

The school of Frank McGuire, Kevin Joyce, Brian Winters, Mike Dunleavy and Alex English is going to the Final Four for the first time.

Add the names Sindarius Thornwell and Frank Martin to the top of the list.

Thornwell’s 26 points and the Gamecocks’ swarming zone defense meant a 77-70 victory over Florida on Sunday and a berth in the Final Four.

Martin, he of the booming voice and terrifying faces, led the seventh-seeded Gamecocks to the biggest victory in school history and now they will face Gonzaga, the No. 1 seed from the West Regional, in the Final Four on Saturday at Glendale, Ariz.

“Anyone that’s in sports dreams of moments like this,” said Martin, who was doused with water and dancing as soon as he entered the locker room. “It’s not something that you start dreaming it the year you win 25 games. You dream it every

single day.”

The game was as close as expected until the final minute. There were 14 lead changes and 10 ties. The last lead change came on two free throws by Thornwell with 2:24 left that made it 65-63. Fourth-seeded Florida managed just three field goals over the final 3:55.

Thornwell, the regional MVP, followed the deciding free throws with a nice assist to Maik Kotsar for a 4-point lead. It seemed Thornwell, who scored eight straight points for the Gamecocks, was always where he needed to be including making a steal with 40 seconds left that turned into a 73-68 lead.

“Plays needed to be made down the stretch, and I stepped up and made plays,” Thornwell said.

Teammate Duane Notice knew Thornwell would come through.

“He’s capable of doing anything on both sides of the basketball. So it doesn’t surprise me,” he said. “His senior leadership just kicked in. He don’t want us to lose. He

don’t want our season to end.”

“Thornwell was just being Thornwell,” Florida coach Mike White said of the SEC player of the year as voted by coaches. “He’s one of the best players in the country.”

PJ Dozier added 17 points for the Gamecocks, Chris Silva had 13 and Kotsar 12.

Justin Leon had 18 points for the Gators who managed a 40-33 halftime lead on 7-for-12 shooting from three-point range. But that was it. Florida was 0-for-14 from beyond the arc in the second half, a lot like the 0-for-17 effort the Gators had in their first meeting with South Carolina this season.

“We still got our open looks, but they just, I guess they just went farther than what they were in the first half,” Leon said.

South Carolina, which forced Florida into 16 turnovers, finished 23-for-31 from the free throw line, including a 9-for-10 effort from Thornwell.

It was the third straight game the Gamecocks were trailing at the half and went on to win.

Top women's seeds Baylor, Notre Dame out

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Even after Alanna Smith and Stanford pulled off a huge rally to put the Cardinal in position to reach the Final Four, there still was work to do.

That's when Erica McCall stepped up and blocked Notre Dame's path.

Smith's layup with 23 seconds left capped Stanford's comeback from a 16-point deficit in the second half, McCall swatted a last-second shot and the Cardinal edged top-seeded Notre Dame 76-75 Sunday for its first Final Four trip since 2014.

The Irish had the ball under their own basket with 2.2 seconds left and there was a series of timeouts before play resumed. Arike Ogunbowale caught the inbound pass and drove to the basket, and McCall

blocked the shot from behind.

"She took a dribble, and I'm like, I'm going for it whether I get the foul or not," McCall said. "I got a nice clean block off of it. We get the win. Whew, so I'm excited."

Brittany McPhee scored 27 as the second-seeded Cardinal (32-5) won their eighth in a row overall. This was the third straight year Stanford and Notre Dame have met in the NCAA Tournament, with the Cardinal winning the past two.

Stanford coach Tara VanDerveer referenced the Bluegrass State's horse racing history in describing the win at Rupp Arena.

"It took us a while to get going," she said, "but then when we got going, we were charging down that stretch and came across that finish line."

Down 47-31 in the third

quarter, Stanford surged to end Notre Dame's 17-game winning streak.

Ogunbowale finished with a team-high 25 points, and the Irish (33-4) put the ball in her hands at the end.

"It was a screen for Arike," Notre Dame coach Muffet McGraw said of the final shot. "She was wide open and she probably could have shot it. That's hindsight."

The Cardinal are going to the Final Four for the 13th time, and will aim for their third championship under VanDerveer.

Oklahoma City Regional

Mississippi State 94, Baylor 85 (OT): Morgan William scored a career-high 41 points, and No. 2 seed Mississippi State upset top-seeded Baylor 94-85 in overtime Sunday to reach the Final Four for the first time.

William, a 5-foot-5 guard,

was chosen Most Outstanding Player of the regional. She set a school record for most points in an NCAA Tournament game.

Victoria Vivians scored 24 points and Teaira McCowan added 10 for Mississippi State (33-4).

Kalani Brown scored 27 points and Nina Davis had 18 for Baylor (33-4), which lost in the Elite Eight for the fourth consecutive year.

William made a three-pointer to give Mississippi State a 73-68 lead in regulation, but Baylor responded with a 7-0 run, and Brown's basket put the Lady Bears ahead by two. William's layup with 22 seconds remaining tied the game at 75 and forced overtime.

The game featured 24 lead changes.

Larson completes weekend sweep at Fontana

Associated Press

FONTANA, Calif. — A blistering first in qualifying. A surprising first in the Xfinity Series race.

And a steady, tenacious first when it really mattered on Sunday.

Kyle Larson was second to nobody in his home state.

Larson persevered through four late restarts to win at Fontana, adding his second career victory to his overall Monster Energy NASCAR Cup series points lead.

"Lots of fun to be Kyle Larson right now," Larson said with a grin. "Our race cars are really fast in Xfinity and Cup, so it's a blast to show up to the race track every week."

Larson finished second in each of the last three races, but the Sacramento-area native's Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet was the class of the field at Auto Club Speedway all week-end long.

He claimed the second pole

of his career Friday, and he also won the Xfinity race Saturday in a result that surprised him much more than his Cup triumph. The 24-year-old prodigy became just the fourth driver to sweep a race weekend at Fontana.

"Our cars are really good at every race track right now," Larson said. "I feel like I have a shot to win every time I go to the race track. That's always a lot of fun. That's something I've always hoped for, to get to a point like that in my NASCAR career. In the past, I had race tracks where I knew I would be good, but right now, we're going to some tracks that aren't good for me and running up front. It's a lot of fun to have that confidence."

Fontana's bumpy 2-mile track particularly suits Larson's skills, and he was unshakable during the late drama and jockeying typical to the five-wide asphalt one hour east of Los Angeles.

After surging up from fourth

to first with four new tires before the final caution, he made one last outstanding restart and cruised through two overtime laps to win.

"This is just amazing," Larson said. "We have been so good all year long, three seconds in a row. I've been watching all the TV, like, 'He doesn't know how to win.' But we knew how to win today, so that was good."

Brad Keselowski was second, and Clint Bowyer came in third for his best finish since June 2015 and his first top-five finish in 52 races. Martin Truex Jr. was fourth after challenging Larson aggressively, and Joey Logano roared up to fifth.

Larson added to his other career victory, which came on NASCAR's other 2-mile oval at Michigan.

After an early NASCAR season full of dominant cars getting stung at the finish, Larson wasted none of his advantage.

"He's on a really nice roll, and it takes everything," said Keselowski, who surged into

second after two outstanding late restarts. "This is a sport of speed, execution and luck, and when you're on a roll like that, you've got all three on your side."

Ganassi credited the win to his young driver's increasing maturity, along with his fast car, of course. Larson is a former Earnhardt Ganassi Racing development driver who landed with Chip Ganassi Racing in 2014, showing steady promise that built to this spectacular season to date.

"I think he's got a lot of runway, and we don't even have the engines pulled up yet," Ganassi said of Larson's potential. "I think he's got a long way to go. I have no idea what he's capable of. Your guess is as good as mine."

Larson is only the second driver in Fontana history to win from the pole, joining six-time race champion Jimmie Johnson, who did it in 2008. Johnson finished 21st after starting near the back in his backup car.

Williams helps Rockets beat Westbrook

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Lou Williams scored 31 points, James Harden finished with 22 points and 12 assists, and the Houston Rockets cruised to a 137-125 victory over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Sunday.

Oklahoma City star Russell Westbrook had 39 points, 11 rebounds and 13 assists for his second straight triple-double and his 36th this season, but Harden led the Rockets to a 25-point lead through three quarters in the matchup between top MVP candidates.

"He could've easily gotten 40 points and he could've just kept on going," Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni said of Harden. "But he knew these guys were going and threw the ball their way. He just plays the game the way it should be played."

Trevor Ariza and Eric Gordon added 24 points apiece for the Rockets, whose lead was trimmed to eight on a three-pointer by Westbrook with about 90 seconds left. The Rockets then scored four quick points to secure the victory.

Harden left late in the game after crashing into the court and appearing to injure his left wrist, but said in a TV interview he expected to be OK.

Celtics 112, Heat 108: Isaiah Thomas scored 30 points, including 20 in the second half, and host Boston beat Miami for its fourth straight victory.

The win moved Boston (48-26) within percentage points of Cleveland (47-25) for the top spot in the Eastern Conference.

Warriors 106, Grizzlies 94: Klay Thompson scored 21 of his 31 points in the second half and host Golden State pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Memphis for its seventh straight win.

Stephen Curry added 21 points and 11 assists, and Andre Iguodala scored 20 as the Warriors (59-14) extended their lead to 2½ games over the Spurs for the top spot in the West.

Trail Blazers 97, Lakers 81: Damian Lillard scored 22 points and visiting Portland defeated Los Angeles to pull even with Denver in the race for the

final Western Conference playoff spot.

Both the Trail Blazers and Nuggets are 35-38 with nine games left in the regular season. They play each other Tuesday in Portland.

Pelicans 115, Nuggets 90: Anthony Davis had 31 points and 15 rebounds, helping to compensate for the absence of injured DeMarcus Cousins, and visiting New Orleans boosted its flickering playoff hopes by beating Denver.

Davis had his 45th double-double of the season and finished with 30 or more points for the 32nd time.

Kings 98, Clippers 97: Willie Cauley-Stein made a follow shot with two seconds left, lifting Sacramento to the road win.

Down 85-67 early in the fourth, the Kings rallied while Blake Griffin, Chris Paul and DeAndre Jordan were resting. Buddy Hield hit three three-pointers in the final minutes, pulling the Kings to 96-93 with 2:10 to play.

Hornets 120, Suns 106:

Kemba Walker had 31 points and nine assists, and host Charlotte handed Phoenix its eighth straight loss.

Marvin Williams added 21 points and Nic Batum had 18 points and 10 assists for the Hornets, who have won four of their last five games as they try to make a late playoff push.

Bulls 109, Bucks 94: Nikola Mirotic tied a season high with 28 points, Jimmy Butler had 20 points and a career-high 14 assists, and visiting Chicago pulled away for the win.

Nets 107, Hawks 91: Brook Lopez scored 23 points and visiting Brooklyn handed Atlanta its seventh straight loss.

Atlanta (37-36) continued to struggle without All-Star Paul Millsap, who missed his fifth straight game with left knee tightness.

Pacers 107, 76ers 94: Myles Turner had 17 points and 16 rebounds, Paul George scored 21 and host Indiana (37-36) topped Philadelphia and moved into a tie for fifth place in the Eastern Conference with Atlanta and Milwaukee.

Flyers top Penguins, close in on wild card

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The Philadelphia Flyers are trying to balance desperation and cool heads as they make a last-gasp, late-season run at a spot in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Jakub Voracek and Dale Weise sparked Philadelphia's four-goal third period and the Flyers finished a four-game road trip with a 6-2 win against the rival Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday night.

"Obviously we know where we are in the standings," Voracek said. "It's not going to be easy to make the playoffs. We all know that. We have to look for the results on the other teams. We're just trying to play a little relaxed, a little loose."

Jordan Weal scored his fifth goal in the first period and Valtteri Filppula his ninth in the second, then the Flyers broke it open in the third. Weise got his fifth of the season and Voracek his 19th before Radko Gudas and Shayne Gostisbehere capped the scoring.

Steve Mason stopped 25 shots for the Flyers, who won for the fourth time in seven games.

Philadelphia is six points behind Boston for the second Eastern Conference wild card, with three teams ahead of them and seven games left.

"You look at it one game at a time," Gostisbehere said. "We win, and it takes care of everything else. We just control what we can control right now and that's winning games."

Matt Murray made 27 saves for the Penguins, who missed out on an opportunity to move a point behind the Washington Capitals for the top spot in the Metropolitan Division. Pittsburgh, tied with Columbus for second place in the division, had its five-game point streak end and lost back-to-back home games for the first time this season. The Penguins have lost their last three games, but two of those losses came in shootouts.

Red Wings 3, Wild 2 (OT): Andreas Athanasiou scored 1:52 into overtime and

lifted host Detroit over reeling Minnesota.

The Wild have lost eight of nine and are 3-10-1 in March.

Stars 2, Devils 1 (OT): Tyler Seguin scored on a power play 20 seconds into overtime as Dallas rallied to beat host New Jersey.

Jets 2, Canucks 1: Michael Hutchinson made 28 saves and Adam Lowry scored a power-play goal in the third period to lift host Winnipeg.

Ducks 6, Rangers 3: Andrew Cogliano scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period and Jonathan Bernier made 25 saves as host Anaheim Ducks won its fourth straight game by beating Henrik Lundqvist and the New York Rangers.

Patrick Eaves scored two goals and Ryan Getzlaf had four assists as Anaheim moved two points ahead of idle San Jose and Edmonton for first place in the Pacific Division with seven games remaining.

Lundqvist made 28 saves in his first start since a hip injury March 7. New York could have clinched a playoff spot with a win.