

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, March 7, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Outbreak's impact on military increasing

Stars and Stripes

The coronavirus outbreak widened its impact on the U.S. military as more troops in more countries were quarantined and the Army banned soldiers in Italy from moving to new assignments or attending training schools.

On Friday, the Pentagon said a U.S. soldier assigned to Operation Inherent Resolve in the Middle East was isolated after possible contact with someone infected with COVID-19.

In Norway, almost two dozen U.S. soldiers participating in a large exercise were isolated after possibly encountering a Norwegian service member who tested positive for the virus, the Marine Corps said Friday.

In Italy, a U.S. sailor stationed at Naval Support Activity Naples tested positive for virus Friday, in the first confirmed

case linked to a U.S. service member in Europe.

In addition, the Army has banned soldiers based in Italy from taking new assignments or attending military schools in the U.S.

"Effective immediately, all PCSing soldiers and families on orders from Italy will stop movement," U.S. Army Garrison Italy commander Col. Dan Vogel said Saturday in a Facebook video. "They are delayed for the next 60 days or until further notice."

Likewise, those who were to attend professional military education in the U.S. will not be able to attend unless the course is for six months or longer. In those cases, participants will travel to the U.S. two weeks early and be quarantined before attending the school.

Also Friday, military officials said recruits heading to basic training are being screened for the virus.

"This additional screening assesses a trainee's exposure to infected persons, international travel and a medical screening for [coronavirus] like symptoms," said Leslie Ann Sully, a spokeswoman for Fort Jackson, S.C., where half the Army's recruits go through basic training. "Units are conducting preparations in the event a soldier, family member or civilian employee" is diagnosed with the coronavirus.

The Army started screening recruits Tuesday, and the Navy has been screening during the initial processing of recruits since January, said Cmdr. Dave Hecht, a spokesman for the Chief of Naval Personnel.

The Air Force is also screening and taking temperatures of all recruits at the Military Entrance Processing Stations before they depart for basic training, according to a statement from Air Education and Training Command.

Taliban attacks provoke concern, confusion over terms

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — During the first week of the U.S. peace deal with the Taliban, the militant group resumed its offensives against Afghan troops, provoking an outcry among U.S. officials who say the violence is a threat to the agreement and causing confusion over its terms.

"There definitely is ambiguity between the text of the agreement and what U.S. officials seem to be saying they expect from the Taliban," said Andrew Watkins, a senior Afghanistan analyst at International Crisis Group, a nonprofit think tank based in Brussels. "Things have already reached the point where the U.S. is obliged to draw clear lines."

Just two days after signing the deal Feb. 29, the Taliban told its fighters to resume at-

tacks against the Afghan security forces, although not against U.S. and foreign troops. These attacks broke a partial truce that stood before the deal's signing and prompted a U.S. airstrike Wednesday to protect Afghan troops.

U.S. officials say the Taliban were not living up to their end of the deal.

"Taliban leadership promised the international community they would reduce violence and not increase attacks," Sonny Leggett, a spokesman for U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, said on Twitter.

However, this is not stated in the agreement released to the public, which says that a ceasefire is to be discussed in talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, slated for March 10.

"Nothing that has happened in recent days — the arguments over the prisoner

release, the Taliban assaults on Afghan forces, the US strike on the Taliban — violates the deal," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Wilson Center in Washington.

Because the text of the deal differs from the way U.S. officials are describing it, there has been "some confusion about exactly what has been agreed," said Jarrett Blanc, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a foreign policy think tank.

U.S. officials have given the impression they "drove a hard bargain," said Stephen Biddle, a senior defense fellow at the nonpartisan think tank Council on Foreign Relations, "but being unhappy with the Taliban being more violent than we hoped they would be is not consistent with any clause in the actual signed document."

Spokesmen for U.S. Forces-

Afghanistan and the State Department declined to comment.

The public portions of the deal broadly outline each side's commitments: If the Taliban keep terrorists from operating in Afghanistan, stop attacking the U.S. and its allies, and hold peace talks with the Kabul government, the foreign forces will begin a phased withdrawal to leave the country in 14 months.

Less known is what's in two classified additions attached to the deal, which Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Mark Esper have described as implementing arrangements.

Deadlines contained in the deal are likely to slip, experts say, and even if the Taliban and Kabul come to the table for talks, those negotiations could break down.

Soldier isolated in Mideast over coronavirus

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. soldier assigned to Operation Inherent Resolve in the Middle East has been placed in isolation after possible contact with someone infected with the coronavirus, the Pentagon said Friday.

The soldier's isolation came as a "precautionary measure," Navy Capt. Bill Urban,

a spokesman for U.S. Central Command, said in a statement.

The soldier has undergone testing, which will be processed by Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, Urban said.

In accordance with the guidance issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for COVID-19, the disease caused by the virus, those

the soldier had recent contact with have also been screened, Urban said.

"We have no confirmed cases of COVID-19 among our personnel," he said.

Barbara Starr, Pentagon correspondent for CNN, tweeted Friday that, according to a defense official she did not identify, the soldier had been to Italy on personal leave from Kuwait

and was isolated upon returning to the station.

Italy has taken the worst hit from the virus in Europe, which began first spreading in China in January and has since infected people from around the world. As of Friday, 148 people had died in Italy, the second-largest death toll after China, where more than 3,000 have perished.

23 soldiers quarantined in Norway

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Almost two dozen U.S. soldiers in Norway for a large-scale exercise are in quarantine isolation after possibly encountering a Norwegian service member who tested positive for the coronavirus, the Marine Corps said Friday.

The U.S. soldiers are among the roughly 1,500 personnel from the U.S. Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy in Norway participating in Exercise Cold Response 20, slated to run through March 18.

The Norwegian service member and the 23 soldiers were training at Skjold Garrison in the Troms region of Norway, the Marine Corps said in a statement.

The soldiers, with the 500th Engineer Support Company, 15th Engineer Battalion, based in Grafenwoehr, Germany, have not shown any signs or symptoms of the virus and were put in isolation "as a precautionary measure," the Marine Corps said.

"We remain in close coordination with the Norwegian military and public health authorities to ensure the well-being of our personnel and local population," the Marine Corps said.

Ships stranded in bid to curb spread

Associated Press

BEIJING — The spreading new virus — or fears of it — immobilized cruise ships or left them searching for ports on four continents Saturday as the bug that has infected more than 100,000 people shifted its travel patterns.

Iran declared a "sacred jihad" against the virus after its case numbers spiked anew. Italy shut down its courts, and the Vatican decided to livestream the pope's Sunday blessing. Cruise ships faced trouble in waters of the United States, Malaysia, Egypt and Malta as those aboard got tested or confined to cabins.

Western countries are increasingly imitating China — which has suffered the vast majority of infections — by imposing travel controls and shutting down public events to contain it.

After the city of Venice canceled its cherished Carnival and governments warned citizens against travel to Italy, the epicenter of Europe's outbreak, the country is facing a possible recession. Hotel occupancy rates in the lagoon city are down to 1%-2%.

Cruise ships filled with passengers confronted different virus-related problems.

Officials in California were deciding Saturday where to dock the Grand Princess cruise ship, with 3,500 people aboard, after 21 tested positive for the

virus. There is evidence the ship now idling off San Francisco was the breeding ground for a deadly cluster of 10 cases during an earlier voyage.

In Egypt, a cruise ship on the Nile with more than 150 aboard was under quarantine in the southern city of Luxor after 12 tested positive for the virus. The passengers include American, French and Indian travelers.

Also Saturday, the port of Penang in Malaysia turned away the cruise ship Costa Fortuna with 2,000 aboard because there were 64 passengers from Italy, the center of Europe's epidemic.

It was the second port to reject the ship after Phuket in Thailand. Now, it's heading to Singapore.

And in Malta, which reported its first case of the virus Saturday, the MSC Opera ship agreed not to enter the Mediterranean country's port — even though there are no infections confirmed on board.

Transmission of the virus, which started as a one-way journey outward from the Chinese city of Wuhan, is now going in every direction. New cases in Asia are being imported from Italy. Global travel hubs like Dubai reported cases imported from multiple continents.

The global death toll has risen past 3,400, though most people who have contracted the virus since December have

now recovered.

As of Saturday, nearly 90,000 cases have been reported in Asia; more than 7,000 in Europe; some 5,000 in the Mideast; about 400 in North America; about 50 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and fewer than 50 cases reported so far in Africa.

The virus is still much less widespread than annual flu epidemics, which cause up to 5 million severe cases around the world and 290,000 to 650,000 deaths annually, according to the World Health Organization.

In Iran, fear over the virus and the government's waning credibility has become a major challenge to leaders already reeling from American sanctions. More than 1,000 infections were confirmed overnight, bringing the country's total to 5,823 cases, including 145 deaths.

South Korea, the hardest-hit country outside China, reported 448 new cases for a total of 7,041. The government reported four new deaths for a total of 48.

In the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is urging older adults and people with severe medical conditions such as heart, lung or kidney disease to "stay home as much as possible" and avoid crowds.

Judge: Amazon suit over JEDI contract 'likely to succeed'

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A federal judge has concluded that a bid protest lawsuit brought by Amazon over President Donald Trump's intervention in an important Pentagon cloud computing contract "is likely to succeed on the merits" of one of its central arguments, according to a court document made public Friday.

The document provides the first indication of how Court of Federal Claims judge Patricia Campbell-Smith views the evidence presented on both sides.

In a blow to Microsoft and the Defense Department, Campbell-Smith ordered the Pentagon to halt work on JEDI last month. In an opinion explaining her reasoning, Campbell-Smith sided with Amazon's contention that the Pentagon had made a mistake in how it evaluated prices for competing proposals from Amazon and Microsoft. She also concluded that the mistake is likely to

materially harm Amazon, an important qualifier for government contract bid protests. And she rejected arguments raised earlier by Microsoft and the Defense Department that Amazon should have raised its concerns sooner.

A Defense Department spokesman expressed disappointment in the ruling but declined to comment on its specifics.

"The Department is disappointed in the Court's ruling," Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Robert Carver said in an email. "We remain focused on getting this critical capability into the hands of our warfighters as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Campbell-Smith has not yet ruled on Amazon's contention that Trump interfered personally in the bidding process. Representatives from Amazon did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Friday's ruling.

VA proposes new rules for caregiver program

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs published new rules Friday for its caregiver support program, putting the agency one step closer to expanding benefits to more veteran caregivers after months of delays.

The proposed changes to the program are outlined in a 200-page document published in the Federal Register on Friday. The public will have 60 days — until May 5 — to provide feedback.

Stephen Whitehead, national commander of Disabled American Veterans, said it was an "important step to correct a longstanding injustice."

The VA has struggled to comply with a measure in the VA Mission Act, approved in 2018, that ordered the agency to expand benefits to caregivers for veterans from the Gulf War and Vietnam War eras. The program currently provides benefits such as monthly stipends, health insurance and medical training only to caregivers for veterans injured after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The VA missed a deadline last fall to establish the information technology needed to expand caregiver benefits to families of

pre-9/11 veterans — a deadline that had been extended from the previous year. The missed deadline pushed back other target dates, delaying enrollment into the program at least until this summer.

Richard Stone, executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, told lawmakers last week that the IT system is "progressing well." The 20,000 families in the caregiver program have been moved onto the system. Next, they're working on its ability to automatically pay beneficiaries and take in new applicants.

"We are quite optimistic that by the summer the program will be ready for the secretary to certify," Stone said.

However, there could be more delays depending on the feedback the VA receives about the proposed rules published Friday, Stone said.

One major change in the proposed rules is to include veterans with any service-connected disability as eligible for caregiver support, including illnesses and disease. Currently, the program specifies that only injured veterans are eligible. Confusion in what constitutes an "injury" has led to inconsistencies about who can be admitted, the VA said.

Turkey, Greece launch tear gas in border standoff

Associated Press

EDIRNE, Turkey — A group of migrants on Saturday tried to bring down a fence in a desperate attempt to bust through the border into Greece while others hurled rocks at Greek police. Greek authorities responded, firing volleys of tear gas at the youths.

At least two migrants were injured in the latest clash between Greek police and migrants gathered on the Turkish side of a border crossing near the Greek village of Kastanies. As in previous confrontations this week, officers in Greece

fired tear gas to impede the crowd and Turkish police fired tear gas back at their Greek counterparts.

Groups of mostly young men tied ropes onto the fence in an attempt to tear it down. Some shouted "Allah is Great" while others shouted "open the border."

It was not immediately clear what caused the two migrants' injuries. A Greek government official said the tear gas and water cannons were used for "deterrence" purposes.

Thousands of migrants headed for Turkey's land border with Greece after President Recep

Tayyip Erdogan's government said last week that it would no longer prevent migrants and refugees from crossing over to European Union territory. Greece deployed riot police and border guards to repel people trying to enter the country from the sea or by land.

Erdogan plans to be in Brussels on Monday for a one-day working visit. A statement from his office did not specify where he would be during his visit or the reason why he's heading to the EU's headquarters.

The announcement came hours after EU foreign ministers meeting in Croatia on Fri-

day criticized Turkey, saying it was using the migrants' desperation "for political purposes."

In a statement Saturday, the Greek government said that around 600 people, aided by Turkish army and military police, threw tear gas at the Greek side of the border overnight. It also said there were several attempts to breach the border fence, and fires were lit in an attempt to damage the barrier.

"Attempts at illegal entry into Greek territory were prevented by Greek forces, which repaired the fence and used sirens and loudspeakers," the statement read.

Trump tours tornado damage in Tenn.

Associated Press

COOKEVILLE, Tenn. — President Donald Trump on Friday toured a neighborhood reduced to rubble by a tornado earlier this week and marveled at “the tremendous heart” he witnessed. He also offered a message for survivors and those who lost family members: “We love them; they’re special people,” he said.

Trump assumed the role of national consoler as he traveled to Tennessee. Trump surveyed devastated communities in

Putnam County, where a tornado tore a 2-mile-long path, killing 18 people, including five children under 13. Many more people were injured, some critically.

Statewide, the death toll stood at 24 from a pair of storms.

Trump was met upon his arrival by Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn and other top officials.

“It’s been a painful, tragic week for our state,” Lee said after surveying with Trump a street where eight people were killed.

The street was filled with debris where houses once stood. Limbs were crudely snapped from trees. A white laundry basket, chairs from a dining table, cinder blocks and a step ladder dotted the landscape.

Trump then met with survivors and volunteers at a local church filled with boxes of emergency supplies, pallets of water and tables filled with clothes.

“When you have those who lost somebody, that’s a very tough situation,” Trump said

during the nearly 40-minute stop. “We are with you all the way.”

He posed for pictures and shook hands with people before speaking to emergency personnel.

“Nobody’s seen what you had to go through,” Trump said.

Such trips have become familiar for the president, who has visited numerous scenes of disaster and tragedy after hurricanes, mass shootings and wildfires during the past three years.

President names Rep. Meadows to be chief of staff

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the midst of one of the most daunting crises of his administration, President Donald Trump announced he had made a major staff overhaul, replacing his acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney with Republican Rep. Mark Meadows.

While much of the country was focused on the spreading coronavirus, Trump announced the surprise reshuffle by Friday night tweet, saying Mulvaney would become the U.S. special envoy for Northern Ireland.

“I have long known and worked with Mark, and the relationship is a very good one,” he wrote, thanking Mulvaney — who never shook his “acting” title — “for having served the Administration so well.”

The long-rumored move comes as Trump has been pulling together a team of loyal-

ists and allies ahead of what is expected to be a bitter reelection fight. But the timing — as his administration was already facing criticism over its handling of the outbreak — threatened to exacerbate concerns about the government’s ability to protect the nation from a virus that has now infected more than 100,000 people worldwide. Meadows will be Trump’s fourth chief of staff in as many years.

Mulvaney had been leading the administration’s interagency response to the virus until Trump designated Vice President Mike Pence to lead the whole-of-government effort more than a week ago.

It was just one of a long series of downgrades for Mulvaney, whose relationship with Trump began to sour not long after he was named to the position in December 2018. Indeed, Trump had been eyeing the

change for many months, according to people familiar with his thinking, but wanted to wait until after the impeachment saga was over to make his move.

Meadows, the onetime leader of the House Freedom Caucus, is a longtime Trump confidant and sounding board, whose political instincts Trump respects. He announced last year that he would not be seeking reelection for his North Carolina House seat, and said he expected to join Trump’s team in some capacity, though it was not clear in what role.

He was officially offered the job Thursday, according to one of the people familiar with the matter, who, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the changes publicly. Mulvaney was informed Friday.

Biden uses Obama in 6-state ad buy ahead of primaries

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Joe Biden’s presidential campaign is plowing \$12 million into a six-state ad buy ahead of the March 10 and March 17 primaries, his largest single advertising effort of the 2020 campaign and a demonstration of his resurgent campaign’s new financial footing.

The former vice president is using two television and digital ads, one a spot touting his rela-

tionship with President Barack Obama, the other a new counter to rival Bernie Sanders’ current ad campaign hammering Biden on his Social Security record.

The purchase, Biden’s first since his commanding South Carolina primary victory and Super Tuesday surge generated an influx of donor support, underscores that both Biden and Sanders now have the wherewithal to fight it out on the airwaves as long as the

nominating fight continues.

A new Biden ad, “Always,” defends against Sanders’ characterization that Biden is a threat to Social Security benefits, a contention the Vermont senator has made for months but ratcheted up since Biden climbed past him in the national delegate count after winning 10 out of 14 Super Tuesday states.

The second Biden ad, “Service,” features video of Obama

awarding Biden the Presidential Medal of Freedom shortly before the pair ended their second terms in national office. “Joe’s candid, honest counsel made me a better president and a better commander in chief,” Obama says in the video, touting Biden’s various roles in his administration. “All of this makes him the finest vice president we have ever seen. The best part is he’s nowhere close to finished.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man sold guns, parts stolen from ATF

PA JOHNSTOWN — A man awaits sentencing after pleading guilty to charges that he bought and sold guns and gun parts that had been stolen from a disposal facility.

Richard Adam Schreiber, 38, of Everett, pleaded guilty to five federal counts related to the thefts by a contract security guard at the National Firearms and Ammunition Destruction Branch in Martinsburg, W.Va.

The former guard, Christopher Lee Yates, told investigators he took guns, gun parts and ammunition that had been seized during criminal investigations or were retired by federal agencies, authorities said.

Woman steals skeleton over gesture

NM CUYAMUNGUE — A woman is facing a larceny charge after authorities said she stole a neighbor's anatomical skeleton model that allegedly was making an offensive gesture toward her.

Diana Hogrebe of Cuyamungue, N.M., told Santa Fe County Sheriff's deputies she was offended by the way the skeleton's hand was posed — with the middle finger pointed up.

Hogrebe told the Santa Fe New Mexican the episode was the culmination of a monthslong feud between her and neighbor Joseph Downs, who she said has hassled her family and other nearby residents.

The skeleton has not been located, authorities said.

Couple to open 1st theater in 12 years

HI WAILUKU — The Hawaiian island of Molokai could have its first movie the-

ater in 12 years if the project is approved by local regulators.

The owners of the RWH Chen Building in Kaunakakai plan to open a 48-seat theater, The Maui News reported.

Brad and Grace Ellis recently renovated the space on the island in Maui County.

"When we started renovating it, we were amazed at the number of people who were saying we could use a movie theater," Brad Ellis said.

Man charged in huge identity fraud scam

RI PAWTUCKET — A Rhode Island man has been charged with operating a large-scale identity fraud scam, according to state police.

Samuel Mate, 35, of Pawtucket, was charged with five counts of identity fraud and 22 counts of wrongfully obtaining telecommunication services.

State police began investigating a scam reported by the cable provider, Cox Communications, in 2018. Authorities said Mate stole several people's identities and used them to open fraudulent accounts with Cox Communications throughout Rhode Island. Mate allegedly received about \$28,600 through the scam.

Cops: Home set ablaze with kids inside

LA JENNINGS — A Louisiana woman is in custody, accused of setting on fire the house she was renting with her three children inside.

The State Fire Marshal's Office, in a news release, said agents arrested Mandy Rochelle, 31, on one count of aggravated arson.

The Jennings Fire Department responded to a call about a residential fire.

Investigators learned Ro-

chelle and her estranged husband, Wilbert Rochelle Jr., 37, had argued prior to the fire, but the husband had left the home before the blaze began. Rochelle's three children were in the home at the time of the fire, authorities said.

Cops: Ex-mail carrier sold pot on route

WV HUNTINGTON — A former U.S. Postal Service worker in West Virginia has been sentenced to six months in prison for selling marijuana along his mail route, officials said.

U.S. Attorney Mike Stuart said Michael Morton, 55, pleaded guilty to selling marijuana while working as a letter carrier in Huntington between 2015 and 2018.

Morton admitted to distributing around 175 pounds of marijuana during the time frame, Stuart said.

Troopers rescue trucker before blast

NJ BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP — Two New Jersey state troopers pulled a trucker to safety just seconds before his burning tractor-trailer exploded.

Trooper Robert Tarleton had stopped a vehicle when he saw the truck become engulfed in flames after it hit a guardrail and bridge abutment, state police said.

"He immediately returned the driver's credentials and ran back to his troop car to request for fire and emergency medical services personnel to respond to the crash," state police said.

Tarleton drove to the scene of the crash, where State Police Lt. Edward Ryer, who was headed home from work, was trying to rescue the driver.

Police body camera video

showed the two troopers worked together to drag the trucker from the cab to safety seconds before it exploded.

Police seize \$1.5M worth of marijuana

NC GREENSBORO — Authorities in North Carolina said they've intercepted \$1.5 million worth of marijuana that was passing through the state along an East Coast drug route.

The Guilford County Sheriff's Office said it seized 331 pounds of marijuana and 30 pounds of a concentrated form of cannabis known as "wax."

The sheriff's office said that North Carolina was not the intended destination of the drugs. The office said that the seizure disrupted the supply of drugs along the East Coast.

Pepper spray mistaken for body spray

FL JACKSONVILLE — A Florida middle school student mistakenly released pepper spray after grabbing what he thought was a canister of body spray from another student, school district officials said.

The seventh-grade student has been issued a civil citation for the incident at Highlands Middle School in Jacksonville that sent 41 students to hospitals for treatment of minor injuries, Principal Evan Daniels said in pre-recorded messages sent to parents.

"Thinking it was body spray, the student who took the canister actually sprayed himself as if he were applying a body fragrance product," Daniels said.

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Lakers prevail in showdown with Bucks

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James has repeatedly insisted he doesn't care about winning another MVP award. He knows almost nobody outside the Los Angeles Lakers' locker room thinks he'll beat Giannis Antetokounmpo for the honor.

When the reigning MVP brought his Milwaukee Bucks to Staples Center on Friday night, James' brilliant performance still demonstrated the debate shouldn't be over just yet.

James had 37 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to win his showdown with his fellow All-Star Game captain, and the Lakers beat Milwaukee 113-103 in a clash of the NBA's conference leaders.

Anthony Davis scored 14 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter as the Lakers (48-13) split their season series with the league-leading Bucks (53-10). Los Angeles was carried to its 10th win in 11 games overall by James, who scored 14 points in the third quarter and then kept LA ahead down the stretch.

James also frequently guarded Antetokounmpo during the middle quarters with consistent success. James capped his night with a one-handed spinning dunk with 27 seconds left, sparking the last of many "M-V-P!" chants for him at Staples Center.

"We know who we are, and this is great competition," James said. "To have the opportunity to compete at a high

level, that's fun and exciting. But we know what we're capable of."

The victory even had a symbolic meaning for James and the Lakers: They formally clinched their first playoff spot since 2013, ending the longest drought in franchise history.

"I came here to put this franchise back where it needed to be," James said. "The league is not what it is if the Lakers are not winning."

James has transformed himself into the NBA's assists leader this season to get the most out of Davis, but he did it without losing any of his own scoring acumen. The Lakers depend on his steady excellence on both ends, and he has rarely been better this season than he was

against the Bucks.

"What was more impressive to me was his defense on Giannis," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "For him to take on that assignment and still do what he did offensively, just an incredible performance."

Antetokounmpo had 32 points and 11 rebounds for the Bucks, who have lost two of three games for the first time since October. Donte DiVincenzo scored 17 points for Milwaukee, which has still won seven of nine overall.

"We definitely did not play smart," Antetokounmpo said. "We put them at the line so easily. We've just got to do better. Obviously we're going to learn a lot from this game."

NBA roundup

Sabonis' double-double helps Pacers hold off Bulls

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Domantas Sabonis dominated with 24 points and 12 rebounds, and the Indiana Pacers hung on to beat the Chicago Bulls 108-102 on Friday night.

The Pacers led by as much as 23 in the third quarter and withstood a big push in the fourth to win for the fifth time in six games. They also moved back into a tie with Philadelphia for fifth place in the Eastern Conference, even though they were missing two of their top three scorers with T.J. Warren (sore left leg) and Malcolm Brogdon (sore left hip) sidelined.

"We're a very talented group, and our depth is one of our strengths," said Victor Oladipo, who scored 16 in 26 minutes after missing two games with a sore right knee. "It's no surprise to me that guys stepped up and played well tonight."

Sabonis came through in a big way and tied Troy Murphy's club record with his 49th double-double this season.

The Pacers won their ninth straight over the Bulls, who lost for the 12th time in 14 games despite rookie Coby White scoring 26 points and Shaquille Harrison setting a career high with 25.

Mavericks 121, Grizzlies 96: Kristaps Porzingis had 26 points and 11 rebounds and Luka Doncic added 21 points as host Dallas beat Memphis.

It was Porzingis' fifth straight game with at least 20 points and 10 rebounds for the Mavericks, who quickly built on a 12-point halftime lead, dominated the third quarter 34-16 and improved to 14 games over .500 for the first time this season. Seventh in the Western Conference, they remain a half-game behind Oklahoma City.

Josh Jackson led the Grizzlies, eighth in the West, with 16 points off the bench. Memphis, which failed to move over .500 for the first time since Feb. 20, came off the first back-to-back 39-point road wins in NBA history.

Suns 127, Trail Blazers

117: Aron Baynes scored a career-high 37 points on a career-best nine three-pointers, Dario Saric added 24 points and Phoenix snapped a four-game skid by beating visiting Portland.

Baynes was 9-for-14 from long distance to tie a single-game franchise record, and was 12-for-23 overall. He also had 16 rebounds. Phoenix never trailed and made 19 three-pointers.

Pelicans 110, Heat 104: Brandon Ingram overcame a poor shooting performance that included missing 15 of his first 17 shots by scoring five points in the final 62 seconds to help host New Orleans hold off Miami.

The Pelicans, who led by as many as 15 in the fourth quarter, snapped a three-game losing streak. Miami had its four-game winning streak halted.

Nets 139, Spurs 120: Caris LeVert had 27 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists and host Brooklyn pounded San Anto-

nio in Gregg Popovich's return from a one-game absence.

LeVert, who had a career-high 51 points in a victory at Boston on Tuesday, recorded his first career triple-double.

Magic 132, Timberwolves 118: Nikola Vucevic had 28 points and 12 rebounds, and Markell Fultz added 24 points for visiting Orlando, which snapped a three-game skid by shooting a season-best 60.7% from the floor.

Jazz 99, Celtics 94: Mike Conley made six three-pointers and scored 25 points, Jordan Clarkson added 17 and Utah beat host Boston for its fourth consecutive victory.

Thunder 126, Knicks 103: Danilo Gallinari scored 22 points in 27 minutes and led five teammates in double figures as visiting Oklahoma City routed New York.

Wizards 118, Hawks 112: Bradley Beal scored 35 points and host Washington held off Atlanta, which was without scoring leader Trae Young because of flu-like symptoms.

Hockey Hall of Famer 'Pocket Rocket' dies

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Henri Richard, the speedy and durable center who won a record 11 Stanley Cups with the Montreal Canadiens, died Friday. He was 84.

The Canadiens announced the death of the Hall of Famer on Twitter, calling him "one of the organization's greatest legends and ambassadors." Richard had Alzheimer's disease.

He was better known as the younger brother of superstar Maurice "Rocket" Richard and was nicknamed the Pocket Rocket for his 5-foot-7, 160-pound frame.

"Henri Richard was one of the true giants of the game," NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said, lauding him as an "incomparable winner, leader, gentleman."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also paid tribute to Richard on Twitter.

"A legend on and off the ice, in Montreal and beyond, Henri Richard was one of the fiercest competitors in hockey history. And as an 11-time Stanley Cup champion, he set a record that no one has matched. Rest in peace, Pocket Rocket," Trudeau tweeted.

Known for his tenacity and playmaking, Richard was captain of the Canadiens from 1971 until his retirement in 1975. He succeeded the legendary Jean Beliveau, with whom he shares the record of playing 20 seasons for the NHL club.

Henri Richard played 1,256 regular-season games, another Canadiens record. He scored 358 goals and had 1,046 points, third in team history behind

Guy Lafleur (1,246) and Beliveau (1,219). He added 129 points in 180 playoff games.

His 11 Stanley Cups, one more than Beliveau and former Canadiens captain Yvon Cournoyer, is unlikely to be surpassed. Seven were won when the NHL had only six teams.

"Obviously, his record of 11 Stanley Cup wins will never be beaten," Hall of Famer Serge Savard said of his teammate of eight seasons. "Even though he played in the shadow of his brother and of the other big stars who made their mark with the Canadiens — who are all in the Hall of Fame, by the way — (Richard) found the way to leave his own mark."

Richard twice led the NHL in assists, with 52 in 1957-58 and 50 in 1962-63. He had nine

20-goal seasons, including a high of 30 in 1959-60. He won the Bill Masterton Trophy for sportsmanship and perseverance in 1974 and was selected to four league All-Star teams.

The Canadiens retired his No. 16 on Dec. 10, 1975, and he was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1979.

Maurice Richard, who was 15 years older, retired after the 1960 season. Henri stayed on and won four more Cups over a five-year span from 1965 to 1969. A highlight was in 1966, when Richard's only goal in the final was the Cup winner in overtime in Detroit.

In 1971, he did it again, scoring the series-deciding goal in the third period of Game 7 in Chicago. Two years later, in 1973, Richard won his 11th Cup, his only one as captain of the Canadiens.

NHL roundup

Devils halt Blues' winning streak at eight games

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — The St. Louis Blues' eight-game winning streak came to an end at the hands of a team very few would have expected to beat them.

The New Jersey Devils ended more than six years of frustration against the Blues by stunning the defending Stanley Cup champions 4-2 on Friday night.

And it was a stunner in all aspects.

Dakota Mermis scored his first NHL goal. Fellow defenseman Connor Carrick got his first of the season. Cast-aside goaltender Cory Schneider made 31 saves and added an assist in posting his first win at home in more than a year and helping New Jersey end a 12-game skid against the Blues, dating to January 2014.

"They beat us pretty badly the last few years since I've been here, so it's nice to take one from them and I thought we played well," said Schneider,

who was banished to the AHL in November after a bad start. "I don't think we snuck one out or got lucky, but we matched them play for play and I thought we were with them right until the end."

The Blues, who started their winning streak with a shutout of New Jersey on Feb. 18, didn't go easy. They closed their deficit to 3-2 on a goal by Jaden Schwartz with 3:11 and were in it until Joey Anderson iced the game with an empty-net goal with 57 seconds to play.

"We played some real good hockey," Blues coach Craig Berube said. "We won eight games in a row and just wound up just not playing good enough tonight. You are not always going to have your best game, night in and night out. This tonight, I thought they were a lot better than us. So they deserved to win."

Red Wings 2, Blackhawks 1: Tyler Bertuzzi and Robby Fabbri scored and host Detroit beat Chicago.

Jonathan Bernier stopped 32 shots for the Red Wings. They have an NHL-low 37 points and trail the rest of the league by 20-plus points.

Patrick Kane scored his 31st goal with 1:05 left in the second period to pull Chicago within a goal. Corey Crawford had 23 saves for the Blackhawks.

Jets 4, Golden Knights 0: Connor Hellebuyck made 29 saves for his league-leading sixth shutout of the season, leading host Winnipeg past Vegas.

Patrik Laine and Nikolaj Ehlers each had a goal and an assist, Kyle Connor got his team-leading 36th goal and Mathieu Perreault also scored for the Jets.

Flames 3, Coyotes 2: Johnny Gaudreau, T.J. Brodie and Mikael Backlund scored, Matthew Tkachuk assisted on all of the goals and Calgary beat visiting Arizona.

The Flames are 6-3-1 in their last 10. They moved within three points of Pacific Division-

leading Vegas and a point behind second-place Edmonton.

Ducks 2, Maple Leafs 1: Carter Rowney and Adam Henrique scored, John Gibson and Ryan Miller combined to stop 30 shots and host Anaheim beat Toronto.

Gibson made 26 saves before coming off with 9:40 remaining in the game after Henrique's goal. Gibson appeared to be injured while making a save on a shot by John Tavares.

Miller stopped four shots in relief. It was the 778th appearance of his career, moving him into second place for NHL games played by U.S.-born goaltenders.

Canucks 6, Avalanche 3: Zack MacEwen scored two goals and host Vancouver beat Colorado to snap a four-game losing streak.

J.T. Miller and Antoine Roussel each had a goal and an assist for Vancouver. Troy Stecher added a goal and Tanner Pearson scored into an empty net.

Sports briefs

Nets fire Atkinson morning after victory

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kenny Atkinson won't have the chance to coach Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving together in Brooklyn.

The Nets surprisingly split with their coach Saturday, even as they remain on track for a second consecutive playoff berth.

The morning after Atkinson guided the Nets to a 139-120 rout of San Antonio, the Nets announced the decision to part with the fourth-year coach.

"After discussions with Kenny about the progress of the season, we mutually agreed that a coaching change would be in the best interest of the team," general manager Sean Marks said in a statement. "This was an extremely diffi-

cult decision, however the organization believes it is one that is necessary at this time."

Assistant Jacques Vaughn will serve as coach for the rest of the season. He coached Orlando for two-plus seasons, from 2012-15.

The Nets are in seventh place in the Eastern Conference. Atkinson was 118-190 in 3½ seasons of his first NBA head coaching job.

Women's hockey worlds canceled

The women's world hockey championships in Canada were canceled Saturday because of the new coronavirus.

International Ice Hockey Federation President Rene Fasel told The Associated

Press the decision was made by conference call. The two-week tournament was set to open March 31, with venues in Halifax and Truro, Nova Scotia.

Fasel said by phone that concerns were raised regarding the health of players and fans attending the tournament in light of the global spread of the virus.

Fasel noted the difficulties some of the eight nations will encounter in simply making travel plans, such as Japan, where almost all sports events and large gatherings have been canceled.

This marks the second time the women's worlds have been canceled. The 2003 tournament scheduled for Beijing was called off because of the SARS outbreak in China.

Norway's Kilde takes men's World Cup lead

KVITFJELL, Norway — Aleksander Aamodt Kilde seized the lead in the overall Alpine World Cup standings by finishing second in Saturday's downhill won by Matthias Mayer.

Kilde picked up 80 World Cup points to take a lead of 54 over Alexis Pinturault, who was outside the top-30 scoring places in his first downhill start since 2013.

The title race calls for different tactics after Friday's cancellation of the March 18-22 finals meeting at Cortina d'Ampezzo, in a northern Italy region affected by the spreading coronavirus.

— Associated Press

No. 5 San Diego State advances to MWC title game

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — San Diego State has made a habit of getting knocked around early the last few weeks. It also has made a habit of absorbing the early blows, landing some solid counter-punches and ultimately scoring the knockout.

The No. 5 Aztecs followed that same script once again Friday night in the Mountain West Tournament semifinals against Boise State, overcoming a 16-point first-half deficit and cruising to an 81-68 victory.

Malachi Flynn, the Mountain West's Player of the Year, had 22 points, five rebounds and five assists, and KJ Feagin added 21 points and six rebounds for San Diego State (30-1). The Aztecs will face Utah State in the championship game.

The Aztecs are in the title game for the third consecutive year, the sixth time in the last seven seasons and the 10th time in the last 12. More importantly, they took another step closer to locking down a No. 1 seed in

the NCAA Tournament for the first time in school history.

"It's a different feeling than last year, even though it's still the championship game," coach Brian Dutcher said. "Last year, we weren't going to the NCAA Tournament unless we won (the conference title). This year, we know we're going to the NCAA Tournament. So, yeah, we want to win (Saturday) in the worst way, but we're focused on two weeks from now when the NCAA Tournament starts."

San Diego State, which trailed at halftime in each of its previous four games, actually jumped out to a quick 9-2 lead after sinking its first three three-point shots. But the tide quickly turned from there, as Boise State (20-12) scored 26 of the next 31 points, which was part of 35-12 run that gave the Broncos a 37-21 lead with five minutes remaining in the half.

That's when San Diego State woke up — on both ends of the court. The Aztecs closed the half on a 19-3 tear that tied it at 40, with guard Jordan Schakel's

three-pointer in the waning seconds capping the run. San Diego State made six of its final seven shots in the first half and held the Broncos without a field goal over the final five minutes.

The Aztecs stayed hot in the second half, scoring 20 of the first 28 points to open a 60-48 advantage. Over the game's final 25 minutes, San Diego State outscored Boise 64-31 en route to its third double-digit victory over the Broncos in less than two months.

"Beating a team three times in a season is hard," said Feagin, who hit 8 of 15 shots, going 5-for-11 from three-point range. "We got off to a great start, but basketball is a game of runs and teams are going to hit shots. And we're not perfect. We made some mistakes that they capitalized on. But we're resilient and we're a talented team, and we know we're going to get everybody's best shot at this point. So they came out pumped and ready for the game, but we had a better

punch at the end."

The Aztecs made 15 three-pointers, shot 49.1% from the field and held Boise State to just 23.3% shooting in the second half (7-for-30) after the Broncos shot 57.7% (15-for-26) in the opening 20 minutes.

Alex Hobbs led Boise State with 21 points on 7-for-11 shooting. RJ Williams and Derrick Alston each had 12 points, although Alston missed all seven of his field-goal attempts in the second half.

San Diego State prevailed despite getting outrebounded 35-30, including 14-9 on the offensive glass.

"(Boise State) rocked us on our heels in the first half," Dutcher said. "We got off to a good start, made some shots and then they went on an incredible run on us. It just shows what kind of team I have with great resolve. They didn't panic; they just fought their way back into it and tied it at halftime. I've got good players, and they make me look like a good coach many a night."