

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Volunteers flood NY to help as death toll surges

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York authorities rushed to bring in an army of medical volunteers Wednesday as the statewide death toll from the coronavirus surged past 1,900 and the wail of ambulances in the otherwise eerily quiet streets of the big city became the heartbreaking soundtrack of the crisis.

As hot spots flared around the country in places like New Orleans, Detroit and Southern California, New York City was the hardest hit of them all, accounting for the majority of the state's deaths, with bodies loaded onto refrigerated morgue trucks by gurney and forklift outside overwhelmed hospitals, in some cases in full view of passing motorists. And the worst is yet to come.

"How does it end? And people want answers," New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said. "I want answers. The answer is nobody knows for sure."

Across the U.S., Americans braced for what President Donald Trump warned could be "one of the roughest two or three weeks we've ever had in our country." The White House projected 100,000 to 240,000 deaths in the U.S. before the outbreak is over.

Meanwhile, European nations facing extraordinary demand for hospital intensive-care beds are putting up makeshift hospitals, unsure whether they will find enough healthy medical staff to run them. London is just days from unveiling a 4,000-bed temporary hospital built in a convention center to take non-critical patients so that British hospitals can stay ahead of an expected surge.

In a remarkable turnaround, rich economies where virus cases have exploded are welcoming help from less wealthy ones. Russia sent medical

equipment and masks to the U.S. Cuba sent doctors to France. Turkey dispatched masks, hazmat suits, goggles and disinfectants to Italy and Spain.

Worldwide, about 900,000 people have been infected and over 44,000 have died, according to a tally kept by Johns Hopkins University, though the real figures are believed to be much higher because of testing shortages, differences in counting the dead and large numbers of mild cases that have gone unreported.

The U.S. recorded over 190,000 infections and more than 4,100 deaths.

In New York, at least 78,000 people have volunteered as medical reinforcements, according to state officials. The group includes recent retirees who are willing to go back to work, health care professionals who can take a break from their regular jobs and people between gigs. Few have made it into the field yet, as authorities vet them and figure out how to use them, but hospitals are expected to begin bringing them in later this week.

Health care workers who have hit the ground already, many brought in by staffing agencies, have discovered a hospital system becoming overwhelmed.

"I have never seen so many human beings in an ER at one time in my entire life," said Liz Schaffer, a nurse from St. Paul, Minn., who had her first shift Tuesday at Mount Sinai Hospital. "Shoulder to shoulder. It is a sight I never thought I would see. Patients are dying every day. Every single day."

The region rushed to set up extra hospital capacity at the mammoth Javits Convention Center, on a Navy hospital ship and in the indoor tennis center that hosts the U.S. Open.

Could herd immunity keep virus-afflicted ships in the fight?

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — The Navy should encourage herd immunity for crews on aircraft carriers in the western Pacific, rather than quarantine sailors ashore who need to be ready for action in the South China Sea, a defense expert and former Navy warship captain said Wednesday.

The San Diego-based aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, which has been operating in the western Pacific, diverted to Guam last week after sailors aboard tested positive for coronavirus.

Their commander, Capt. Brett Crozier, wrote to Navy leaders Monday asking that sailors be quarantined and isolated ashore. The virus has sickened 150 to 200 sailors on the ship, the San Francisco Chronicle reported, citing a senior officer who is aboard.

Adm. John Aquilino, commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet, said during a Wednesday morning teleconference that the Navy is working with Guam's governor to find places, including hotels, if possible, to quarantine and isolate the sailors up to 14 days, according to the Pacific Daily News. Sailors would rotate back to the carrier once they are free of the virus, he said, declining to provide specific numbers of how many will stay on the Theodore Roosevelt, according to the report.

"It's the number that's needed for the ship to remain operational," Aquilino said.

Theodore Roosevelt sailors who test positive are being

moved off the ship and placed in isolation at Naval Base Guam for their required isolation period, Joint Region Marianas spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Rick Moore told Stars and Stripes in an email Wednesday.

"We are not going to confirm specifics about where USS Theodore Roosevelt Sailors are being quarantined or isolated on Naval Base Guam," he said. "Medical representatives from Naval Base Guam evaluate them daily."

The Navy will continue to work with the government of Guam and the Guam Hotel and Restaurant Association to identify lodging for sailors from the warship, he said.

However, Jan van Tol, a former Navy captain who commanded several warships, including the Japan-based USS O'Brien and USS Essex, said it would be a mistake to quarantine most of carrier's crew ashore.

"One needs to maintain a capital ship on deployment ready to fight at any time," van Tol, now a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington, told Stars and Stripes via email Wednesday. "We never know when a conflict or crisis might emerge, especially for ships deployed to [the western Pacific] these days, which remains particularly germane given the current tense U.S.-China relations."

U.S. Naval Base Guam increased its health-protection level to Charlie on Tuesday, which indicates a substantial risk of coronavirus.

Coast Guard: Cruise ships must stay at sea with sick onboard

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The U.S. Coast Guard has directed all cruise ships to prepare to treat any sick passengers and crew on board while being sequestered “indefinitely” offshore during the coronavirus pandemic.

The new rules require daily updates on each ship’s coronavirus caseload for vessels in U.S. waters and come with a stiff warning: Any foreign-flagged vessels “that loiter beyond U.S. territorial seas” should try first to medically evacuate the very sick to those countries instead.

Many of South Florida’s cruise ships are registered in the Bahamas, where hospital capacity is limited and people are still recovering from last year’s Hurricane Dorian.

The rules, which apply to any vessel carrying more than 50 people, were issued in a March 29 safety bulletin signed by Coast Guard Rear Admiral E.C. Jones, whose district includes Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Puerto Rico.

Dozens of cruise ships are either lined up at Port Miami and Port Everglades or waiting offshore due to the coronavirus pandemic. Most have only crew aboard, but Carnival Corp., which owns nine cruise lines with a total of 105 ships, notified the SEC on Tuesday that it has

more than 6,000 passengers still at sea, on three ships that will soon arrive in Fort Civitavecchia, Italy, and Southampton, England, as well as Fort Lauderdale.

Federal, state and local officials have been negotiating over whether Carnival’s Holland America cruise ships, the Zaandam and Rotterdam, would be allowed to dock at Port Everglades this week. But the company’s Coral Princess is coming, too, with what that ship’s medical center called a higher than normal number of people with flu-like symptoms.

Two of four deaths on the Zaandam were blamed on COVID-19 and nine people have tested positive for the coronavirus, the company said. At least 190 more reported symptoms. More than 300 Americans are on the Zaandam and Rotterdam.

Under normal conditions, when a passenger or crew member become too ill for the ship’s medical team to care for, they call the Coast Guard to provide a medical evacuation to an onshore hospital. Under the new rules, sick passengers would be sequestered indefinitely on board.

The Coast Guard will decide if a transfer is absolutely necessary, but the cruise line would be responsible for arranging on-shore transportation and hospital beds.

Vicenza rules keep spouses, others out of delivery room

By NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Pregnant Americans living in Vicenza will have to deliver their babies without spouses or other support people present, because the local Italian hospital, with restrictive new rules to prevent coronavirus spread, is the only option.

The U.S. Army garrison’s birthing center, closed six years ago, can’t be reopened any time soon, health center commander Lt. Col. Joe Matthews said at a virtual town hall meeting Tuesday.

The decision at San Bortolo Hospital to exclude partners mirrors many medical facilities in cities with large numbers of coronavirus infections, though two U.S. military hospitals in Europe continue to allow one support person.

Traveling to those U.S. facilities for obstetric care was likely unworkable, however, because of safety reasons and movement restrictions, said Maj. Ezella Washington, the center’s chief medical officer.

Giving birth at less restrictive nearby Italian hospitals in Padova or Verona posed another set of problems, Washington said, including lack of translation services and increasing numbers of coronavirus cases there.

Home births are out because few midwives in Italy attend them and the military insurer Tricare doesn’t pay for them.

“Right now, the only option and the safest option is San Bortolo,” Washington said in the meeting.

Vicenza officials said they were still exploring other options and that it was possible that some women with exceptional circumstances might gain approval to give birth elsewhere.

Navy families in Naples ‘Get Down Tonight’ amid virus restrictions

By ANN PINSON
Stars and Stripes

Landon Schoenborn, a kindergartner who lives at Naval Support Activity Naples in Italy, counts down to Wednesdays and Fridays every week. Those evenings, he gets to be part of a socially distanced balcony singalong with his neighbors.

“It’s a chance to hang over the rail and shout hellos to their best friends and neighbors in our building who they haven’t played with in so long,” said Tiffany Schoenborn, mother to Landon and his 3-year-old sister, Emelia. “Being stuck in our house, missing out on

play dates, parties, school with friends and beloved teachers, and being restricted to our patios for their only outside play space, isn’t the best.

“But I hope that, having and participating in things like Operation Fun/GDT (Get Down Tonight), this can be a time they’ll look back on and remember fondly despite the circumstances.”

Operation Fun/GDT features music played over the base’s loudspeakers, known as the Giant Voice, at 6 p.m. two nights a week, as residents get a chance to wave hellos and bob along. Italy has been hit particularly hard by the coronavirus pandemic, and the program

was designed to give those on base, whose movement is limited under the country’s sweeping coronavirus restrictions, a chance for a sense of community.

NSA Naples Commanding Officer Capt. Todd Abrahamson came up with the idea for the event, and residents get to vote for the songs they want played via options on the base’s Facebook page.

“It’s so fun for me to dance around holding my 10-month-old, she seems a little overwhelmed by how loud it is but eventually giggles,” Grace Bordt said. “It’s a nice way to break up our time spent inside.”

Thousands of S. Korean employees furloughed

By KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — Following months of warnings, the U.S. military put 4,500 South Korean base employees — about half its local workforce — on unpaid leave indefinitely Wednesday after the allies failed to agree on a new defense cost-sharing deal.

The furlough — the first of its kind — was a blow to the alliance and joint military readiness to fight on the divided peninsula, which commanders say already has been jeopardized by restrictions on movement aimed at preventing spread of the coronavirus.

Negotiators have been deadlocked over

the United States' demand that South Korea sharply increase its contribution to offset the costs of stationing some 28,500 service members on the divided peninsula as defense against the nuclear-armed North.

U.S. Forces Korea commander Gen. Robert Abrams expressed regret and promised to continue to press both governments to reach a new Special Measures Agreement as soon as possible since the previous deal expired at the end of the year.

"The partial furlough of (South Korean) employees is not what we envisioned or hoped would happen," he said in a videotaped message. "The furlough is in no way a reflection of their performance, dedication or conduct, but rather due to a lack of a burden-sharing agreement making programmed funds unavailable."

"These are our employees, our co-workers, our teammates, and we consider them family," he added. "And while this is an unfortunate situation, and we will miss them dearly, we will work to minimize the impact on our 'fight tonight' posture despite the strenuous circumstances."

South Korean officials blamed the American side, saying they had offered compromises including a way to isolate the labor issue while continuing to negotiate on other items.

"Our government has suggested a variety of measures, including the execution of a budget to address the wage issue first, based upon the notion that the furlough does help the combined defense posture," said defense ministry spokeswoman Choi Hyun-soo.

23 Air Force units will become part of Space Force

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Twenty-three U.S.-based Air Force units focused on space operations will move into the Space Force in the coming months as officials build up the military's newest branch, Pentagon officials announced Tuesday.

The units include about 1,840 positions to transfer from the Air Force's control into the Space Force, said Maj. William Russell, a spokesman for the Space Force. Air Force and Space Force officials hope to complete the transfers of those units in the next three to six months, but they con-

ceded the moves would only occur when conditions for each unit were such that a smooth transition could be guaranteed.

The units identified to move conduct a variety of space-based missions including intelligence collection, space-based weapons research and protecting U.S. space assets, such as critical GPS and communications satellites. Most of the units are located in Colorado, where the bulk of the military's space mission is housed but others are located in Maryland, Ohio, California, Hawaii and New Mexico. None of the units will physically move their location to become part of the Space Force, Russell said.

The units will join some 16,000 airmen and Air Force civilian workers who had worked for the former Air Force Space Command, which was moved into Space Force control earlier this year. But none of those airmen have officially transferred into the Space Force, which has only one actual member — Gen. John Raymond, the chief of space operations.

For now, airmen serving in units that have or will soon transfer into the Space Force will remain in the Air Force but assigned temporarily to a Space Force mission, while officials complete the process for service members to move from their current service into the Space Force.

USAF Academy moves up graduation date after cadet deaths

Stars and Stripes

The Air Force Academy has moved its graduation up by more than a month to mid-April as it continues to fight the coronavirus and grapples with the suspected suicides of two seniors, the superintendent of the academy said in a message to cadets.

"On April 18th, the class of 2020 will receive their diplomas in a ceremony designed by cadets," Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria said in the message, which was posted in academy Facebook groups.

"It will not be the traditional graduation ceremony you have imagined for years, but it can be one-of-a-kind and unique ... like the class of 2020," said Silveria, himself a

graduate of the academy.

The decision to move the graduation ceremony forward was taken after two cadets were found dead in their rooms last week in what investigators believe were suicides.

The deaths caused the academy to rethink the strict restrictions imposed on graduating seniors, who have remained on campus since underclassmen were dismissed nearly three weeks ago as part of the academy's efforts to fight the coronavirus.

"We are at war with ... a global pandemic, and that fight is unconventional," Silveria said.

"As a commander in conventional conflicts, I had years of history to call on when making decisions — a playbook we don't have as we battle this pandemic," he said,

announcing that graduation was being moved up by nearly six weeks from its original date of May 28.

"We must make unconventional decisions and take what some would consider extreme measures," Silveria said.

The new ceremony, which the graduating class is planning itself, will allow cadets to "celebrate together while ensuring their health and safety by adhering to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Department of Defense guidelines" against the coronavirus, a post on a Facebook page for alumni said.

No guests, including family and friends, will be allowed to attend the ceremony in person, but it will be livestreamed, the post said.

Biden casts doubt on Dem convention date

The Washington Post

Joe Biden raised significant doubts about whether the Democratic National Convention will be held as planned in July, with the likely presidential nominee suggesting that the party's major gathering, slated for Milwaukee, may need to be altered or postponed.

When asked whether he could envision holding the convention in July, given the concerns about large gatherings in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, Biden said, "It's hard to envision that."

"We should listen to the scientists," the former vice president told Brian Williams in an interview that aired late Tues-

day night on MSNBC.

Biden noted that one reason the convention has been scheduled for mid-July was to accommodate the Olympics, which had been scheduled to begin July 24. Given that the Summer Games have been postponed to next year, Biden raised the possibility that the DNC could postpone the convention, saying, "there is more time now."

The Republican convention is scheduled for August in Charlotte, N.C.

"We ought to be able to do what we were able to do in the middle of the Civil War all the way through to World War II — have Democratic and Republican conventions and pri-

maries and elections, and still have public safety," Biden said. "We're able to do both."

Biden also made the case that the November election may be different from any other before it, and he called on states to begin preparing now for more absentee ballots. He also said that secretaries of state throughout the nation needed to consider a virtual election, with secure remote voting.

"They should be doing that now, planning on it," he added. "This is about making sure that we're able to conduct our democracy while we're dealing with a pandemic. We can do both. It may mean a difference in the way we do it. It may

mean that social distancing doesn't get it done. It may mean that you have a circumstance where you have drive-in voting, literally. You pull up and have — there's a lot of ways to do it. But we should be talking about it now."

During the interview, Biden also again appealed to supporters of Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., but he refrained from calling on his last remaining rival for the Democratic nomination to leave the race.

"Bernie has a lot of very, very strong and ardent followers. And I think it's a hard decision," Biden said. "I'm not going to tell him to stay in or get out, that's his decision."

Census Day arrives with US almost paralyzed by virus

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Census Day — the date used to reference where a person lives for the once-a-decade count — arrived Wednesday with a nation almost paralyzed by the spread of the novel coronavirus. But census officials vowed the job would be completed by its year-end deadline.

The virus's spread has forced the U.S. Census Bureau to suspend field operations for a month, from mid-March to mid-April, when the hiring process would be ramping up for up to 500,000 temporary census takers. The bureau also has delayed the start of counts for the homeless and people living in group quarters like college dorms and

nursing homes, and has pushed back the deadline for wrapping up the head count from the end of July to mid-August.

The Census Bureau is required by federal statute to send the president the counts that will be used to carve up congressional districts — a process known as apportionment — and draw state legislative districts by Dec. 31.

Some groups are suggesting that the deadline be pushed back, though it's currently mandated by federal law.

"We are laser-focused on the statute's Dec. 31 deadline for apportionment counts and population counts. We will continue to assess all of our operations to see if there are any changes that need to be made,"

Michael Cook, chief of the Public Information Office at the U.S. Census Bureau, said Tuesday.

The head count started in late January in rural, native villages in Alaska, but the rest of the country wasn't able to start answering the questionnaire until the second week of March when the Census Bureau's self-response website went live and people received notices in the mail that they could start answering the questions. But that was only a week before many governors and mayors started issuing stay-at-home orders to slow the virus's spread, greatly hindering in-person rallies, meetings and door-knocking by activists to raise awareness about the 2020 census.

Tornado slams into Ala. town amid virus quarantine

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — An apparent tornado slammed into an Alabama neighborhood, shattering more than a dozen homes Tuesday while people were hunkered down inside because of the coronavirus outbreak, as storms caused damage from Mississippi to Georgia.

Near the Alabama-Georgia line in Eufaula, a midday twister pulled the roofs off homes in a neighborhood near the Coun-

try Club of Alabama. The area was left littered with pieces of about 15 houses and trees, but Mayor Jack Tibbs said only one minor injury was reported.

"I was really expecting it to be worse with the coronavirus with people at home, but it wasn't," Tibbs said in a telephone interview.

Tibbs said there was "no doubt" a twister was to blame based on the severity of the damage, and forecasters said photos and radar showed a tornado in the area at the time.

The National Weather Service reported "considerable" damage several hours earlier in George County, Miss., where emergency management director Nancy Smith said trees hit at least two rural homes but there were no immediate reports of injuries.

"The dispatchers are still busy answering all the calls coming in," she said. Utility crews were out working to replace broken power poles within hours.

Multiple trees were down

across central Alabama, including Birmingham's southern suburbs. A barn was destroyed in rural east Alabama, the weather service reported, and video showed debris swirling around a tornado on the ground near the city airport in Troy.

More than 50,000 homes and businesses were without electricity in Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, where the weather service said winds up to 60 mph were possible. Scattered damage extended as far south as northern Florida.

Ohio woman lost 3 family members to virus

Associated Press

COLUMBUS — An Ohio woman whose brother, mother and father died from the coronavirus pleaded for people to stay at home and follow social distancing guidelines, while President Donald Trump issued a disaster declaration for Ohio and ordered federal help for local recovery efforts. A GoFundMe page has been created to support the family.

The Health Department said that it has received Ohio's allotment of personal protective equipment from the national strategic stockpile. That includes more than 100,000 gowns, nearly 500,000 gloves and more than 670,000 masks. But Health Director Dr. Amy Acton said the supplies don't meet the state's needs and urged that supplies be conserved and new items donated.

Puerto Rico

SAN JUAN — Puerto Rico on Wednesday closed its fifth police station in a week, raising concerns about the U.S. territory's ability to respond to the coronavirus pandemic as officers accused the government of exposing one of the largest police departments in a U.S. jurisdiction to COVID-19.

More than 150 officers are under quarantine as dozens await test results on an island that has reported 11 deaths and more than 280 confirmed cases amid a monthlong curfew that has shuttered beaches, parks and nonessential businesses.

"It's not fair that the government is dragging its feet," said Gregorio Matias, vice president of a local police union who demanded more protective equipment. "What do they want? To be left without police officers?"

Connecticut

HARTFORD — Connecticut Children's Medical Center furloughed 400 workers due to the coronavirus outbreak, which has caused elective and other surgeries to be delayed and the number of overall patients to decline, according to officials

with the Hartford-based medical system.

The furloughs are for 60 days and affect about 14% of the system's workforce of 2,800, The Hartford Courant reported. Medical center officials expect all the furloughed employees to return to their jobs, maybe by early June.

Patient volumes have ultimately declined by about half, costing the medical center \$7.5 million to \$9 million a month, said James Shmerling, president and chief executive officer at Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Missouri

CUBA — An eastern Missouri man was charged with making a terrorist threat after he allegedly coughed toward customers and wrote COVID on a cooler at a Dollar Tree store.

John Swaller, 33, of Cuba, was charged Tuesday and was being held on \$25,000 bail in the Crawford County jail.

An employee of the store in Cuba called police because the man was intentionally coughing toward customers and had breathed on a cooler before writing COVID on the inside of the cooler, police said.

Swaller's father told The St. Louis Post-Dispatch that his son doesn't have COVID-19. Cuba police Chief Doug Shelton said that investigators don't know if Swaller has the coronavirus, but officers used protective gear while taking him to jail.

Pennsylvania

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania State Police will no longer respond in person to some types of calls as the agency tries to limit troopers' contact with the public and slow the spread of the coronavirus, officials announced Wednesday.

Calls for lost-and-found, littering, identity theft and general requests to speak to a trooper are among the calls that will now be resolved with "limited or no-scene response," state police said in a news release. The

new policy took effect Wednesday and will be in place until further notice.

State police said that troopers will continue to respond to emergencies.

"To enhance social distancing and keep our personnel and the public safe and healthy, we will begin collecting information via telephone for incidents that do not require an in-person response from a trooper," said Col. Robert Evanchick, the state police commissioner.

Tennessee

SEVIERVILLE — Tennessee officials want tourism businesses to stop soliciting tourists in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

The mayors of five cities in Sevier County urged leisure businesses to halt guests through mid-April, the Sevierville Police Department said in a post on Facebook.

WBIR-TV reported that just a few weeks ago, tourists packed Sevier County even after some big attractions closed down and the public was told to practice social distancing.

Texas

AUSTIN — More than two dozen University of Texas students have tested positive for the coronavirus after taking a spring break trip to Mexico, public health officials said.

A group of about 70 people who are in their 20s took a chartered plane to Cabo San Lucas about 10 days ago, the Austin Public Health Department said Tuesday. So far, 28 people in the group have tested positive for COVID-19, the illness linked to the coronavirus, and dozens more are being monitored, the health department said.

The department said that four people with confirmed cases did not have any symptoms.

"The virus often hides in the healthy and is given to those who are at grave risk of being hospitalized or dying," Austin-Travis County Interim Health Authority Dr. Mark Escott said. "While younger people have less risk for complications,

they are not immune from severe illness and death from COVID-19."

Vermont

MONTPELIER — State officials in Vermont are ordering large retailers that sell critical items such as food and prescription drugs to stop the in-person sale of nonessential products.

Whenever possible, stores such as Walmart, Target and Costco must stop the sale of nonessential items and require online or telephone ordering, delivery and curbside pickup.

"Large 'big box' retailers generate significant shopping traffic by virtue of their size and the variety of goods offered in a single location," Agency of Commerce and Community Development Secretary Lindsay Kurrle said Tuesday. "This volume of shopping traffic significantly increases the risk of further spread of this dangerous virus to Vermonters and the viability of Vermont's health care system."

The items that cannot be sold in person include clothing, consumer electronics, books, furniture and sporting equipment.

Wisconsin

MADISON — Wisconsin's governor said Wednesday that he will use National Guard soldiers to staff undermanned polling sites in next week's presidential primary.

Local election clerks across the state have said that poll workers are quitting in droves out of fears of contracting the coronavirus during Tuesday's election, which also features a state Supreme Court race and hundreds of local races. More than 100 municipalities have reported that they lack enough people to staff even one polling site.

Democratic Gov. Tony Evers told a federal judge in a filing that he will use members of the Wisconsin Army National Guard to help as poll workers, but that even that move likely won't fill all staffing needs.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: Couple accused of abducting man

LA SHREVEPORT — Authorities arrested a Louisiana couple accused of kidnapping a man from a hotel early Sunday, according to police.

Shreveport police charged Wilbert Vanzant and Kayla Owen with aggravated kidnapping, the department said in a statement obtained by news outlets.

The two 29-year-olds were accused of abducting Stephen Hatcher, 36, from a hotel around 1 a.m.

Hatcher told authorities he was bound, beaten and forced to withdraw money from an ATM, according to the statement.

Hatcher escaped and reported the kidnapping to deputies in DeSoto Parish, police said.

Electronics sniffing K-9 assists in porn arrest

FL PENSACOLA — A K-9 capable of detecting electronic storage devices assisted Florida Department of Law Enforcement agents in finding 30 images of child pornography.

FDLE agents arrested Jason Andrew Winn, 41, last week in Pensacola on 30 counts of possession of obscene material and one count of promoting sexual performance of a child, the Pensacola News Journal reported.

Police in Texas learned that obscene material had been downloaded by a computer with an IP address linked to a Pensacola residence, according to an arrest report. The agency told authorities in Florida, where officials said the address was tied to Winn's internet account.

Using a search warrant, officials found pornographic images depicting children on a

laptop. An FDLE K-9 named Maple alerted agents to a box in a closet, where agents found a Paracord bracelet with a USB drive hidden inside, which contained additional images of child pornography.

Town's neighborhood 'safari' created for kids

KY LEXINGTON — A Kentucky town launched a neighborhood "safari" for children during the coronavirus pandemic by displaying stuffed animals in the windows of their homes.

The "Cumberland Hill Zoo Walk" was kicked off Sunday morning in Lexington after 60 houses in the community signed up, WKYT-TV reported.

"I have challenged kids to have a zoologist notebook and then go around and record the animal sightings," said Marian Guinn, the organizer of the zoo walk.

Throughout the week, families in the Cumberland Hill neighborhood will look for animals and submit their findings for a chance to win different prizes.

Container ship back underway after mishap

LA POYDRAS — Traffic restrictions on the Mississippi River have been lifted after a container ship that ran aground was back underway, the U.S. Coast Guard confirmed.

The container ship, called the Belita, ran aground around 3:20 a.m. Friday near Poydras, close to the Plaquemines Parish and St. Bernard Parish lines.

The ship hit a rock-like structure along the shoreline called a riprap, the Coast Guard said.

Petty Officer Lexie Preston said the grounded ship was back underway as of 3 p.m. Friday. No injuries or signs of pol-

lution as a result of the accident were reported, Preston said.

Report: Mass breakout started as jail riot

WA YAKIMA — Last week's breakout from the Yakima County jail began with an inmate refusing to go back to his bed, leading to a riot.

Reports filed by county Department of Corrections officers in court state that one inmate incited others in the jail to throw furniture and other items at officers before breaking down a fire door and escaping.

The Yakima Herald-Republic reported that while the riot was the initial catalyst, those who escaped later told investigators that fear of contracting COVID-19 in the jail was a motivating factor in their decisions to leave.

Fourteen inmates escaped, with eight of them apprehended within 15 minutes. The remaining six were rounded up over the course of the week.

Police seek man who damaged a taro patch

HI WAINIHA — An unidentified man took a backhoe to a taro patch in northern Kauai, damaging a staple of the traditional Hawaiian diet, a local food supply and an attached water line affecting water service in the region, authorities said.

No citations or arrests have been made yet, and water service has since been restored, police said. Witnesses told police they saw a man taking down the fence and tearing up dirt and plants on the property using a backhoe.

This is the first time the taro patch has been damaged since a land debate conflict was settled in court over the property,

property manager Kaimi Hermosura said.

Man held after trooper shot and vehicle stolen

NV ELY — A highway patrol trooper was shot, his patrol vehicle was stolen and a suspect was arrested Friday with possible explosives following a confrontation a little before dawn in a remote area of northeastern Nevada, authorities said.

The Nevada Highway Patrol did not immediately provide information about the condition of the trooper, but confirmed the shooting happened about 6 a.m. on U.S. 93 south of the White Pine County seat of Ely, when the trooper stopped to help a motorist.

A man was detained after 10 a.m., and materials identified as possible explosives were found, said Lincoln County Sheriff Kerry Lee. Lee said it appeared the man acted alone.

Officials see 57 goats in mountain range

WA SPOKANE — Idaho biologists counted 57 mountain goats in the Selkirk Mountain Range this year, the first survey of the animals in the range since 2001.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Wildlife made an aerial observation of the goats that head to steep and bare, rocky areas in the winter, The Spokesman-Review reported. The mountain range runs along the Idaho and Washington state border, extending north into British Columbia.

The biologists counted 34 goats in 2001. In 2019, Idaho updated hunting guidelines to help manage the mountain goat population.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

NFL expects normal season, 14 playoff teams

Associated Press

The NFL is gearing up for a normal season and playoffs — with two additional wild-card teams in the Super Bowl chase.

NFL team owners voted Tuesday to expand the playoffs by one team in each conference for a total of 14 next season as they continue to plan for the 2020 season to begin on time.

During a conference call to discuss league business after the annual meetings were canceled due to the new coronavirus, the owners also awarded one of those extra games to CBS and one to NBC. Three-fourths of the 32 owners needed to approve the change, and the vote was unanimous, football operations chief Troy Vincent said.

As for opening the season on Sept. 10 as scheduled, NFL lead counsel Jeff Pash said: “All of our focus has been on a normal traditional season, starting on time, playing before fans in our regular stadiums and going through our full 16-game regular season and a full playoffs.”

That would include the two

stadiums still under construction in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, plus international games in England and Mexico.

“I expect that international games will be part of our schedule for this year,” Pash added. “We’re optimistic just as we expect conditions in the United States to permit playing a full season that that will be the case for our international partners as well. Obviously, that’s something that we’ll have to work closely with the authorities, public health and other government authorities in those other countries to make sure it’s entirely safe.”

Contingencies are being discussed for all potential interruptions caused by the coronavirus.

As for the first expansion of the postseason field since 1990, when the NFL went from 10 qualifiers to 12, only the teams with the best record in the AFC and NFC will get a bye under the new format; the top two teams in each conference skipped wild-card weekend in the past.

Three games are set for Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 9-10 — pending the NFL schedule going forward as planned; that schedule likely will be released on May 9, according to Brian Rolapp, the league’s chief media and business officer, to give the NFL “flexibility.”

“It’s definitely going to be different,” Washington Redskins linebacker Thomas Davis said. “It just makes it more competitive, it adds more teams in and it allows teams that are hot late in the season like the Titans to be able to make a run — a team that might not normally be in the playoffs (is) getting that opportunity. I like it, though.”

Team presidents and owners were advised of current plans for the draft on April 23-25.

Peter O’Reilly, who oversees organization of major events such as the Super Bowl and draft, said all of the NFL’s preparations have been designed to “ensure the selection process is sound.” That means equitable arrangements for every team; “celebrating and welcoming”

draftees to the league; fan involvement “providing an escape for our fans and perhaps allowing virtual fan access”; and as a fundraiser for people and communities affected by the pandemic.

O’Reilly stressed that social distancing will be maintained, with no more than 10 people together, remaining at least six feet apart. Anyone who is ill will be kept away.

Commissioner Roger Goodell will make the first-round selection announcements from a central hub, and the telecasts will have connectivity at the 32 teams and potentially at some players’ or fans’ homes.

Vincent noted that the powerful competition committee is discussing a potential one-shot extension of the time limit on a draft slot so teams can complete a trade.

O’Reilly said Las Vegas, scheduled to host the draft this year, will get consideration for 2022; the 2021 draft will be held in Cleveland.

Teams having to adjust to the new normal

Associated Press

AURORA, Colo. — Let’s go to the tape.

NFL teams are having to rely more heavily on game film of college prospects as they prepare for the draft at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has halted business as usual.

The social distancing spawned by the coronavirus emergency has halted pro timing days at colleges. It’s also led the league to forbid teams hosting prospects at team headquarters or from visiting them for in-person interviews, face-to-face meetings that are usually such an integral part of the annual evaluations that can make or break a franchise’s fortunes.

“We’ll just have to conclude the best we can from what we can see on the tape,” Denver Broncos general manager John Elway said in a conference call Tuesday.

Broncos coach Vic Fangio said scouts and college personnel appraisers are fond of suggesting ninth-tenths of the evaluation of a player is based on what he did in college with just 10% of the grade coming off the NFL scouting combine, college pro days and/or personal interviews.

“This is the year it will really be tested,” Fangio said. “It will be 90% what you see on tape, and we’ll go from there.”

Fangio is putting a positive spin on the situation.

“We do not have the workout times that you normally have to evaluate guys, but sometimes those workout times and that information just clouds the issue,” Fangio said. “It’s nice to know what a guy runs a 40 in, but how fast does he look on tape is more important.”

“A lot of times you can guess how fast a guy runs, generally speaking. It’s more important

what the tape says.”

Less than an hour’s drive from the Broncos’ headquarters, new University of Colorado head football coach Karl Dorrell is lamenting how FaceTime has replaced face time with his players.

Dorrell, who left his job as the Miami Dolphins receivers coach to take over at Colorado, said truer evaluations are made in person.

“I have a really strong philosophy on that. I think the best way to really get your best evaluation of players is really not on tape,” Dorrell said.

And, Dorrell said, that holds true whether it’s an NFL assistant assessing college talent as he once did or a college coach checking out a high school prospect as he’s doing now.

“I’d rather see the person to evaluate a person. When I was in the NFL evaluating receivers, the combine’s fine, but that’s a

group setting and you’re not really getting specific information that you need,” Dorrell said.

As Elway prepares for a draft unlike any other, he said a radical decision Fangio made this spring is paying unexpected dividends as the team builds its draft board for the April 23-25 selection process.

Fangio didn’t take his assistant coaches to the combine in Indianapolis at the end of February and instead had them work remotely all week back in Denver evaluating players at their respective positions.

“It helped us tremendously, I think,” Elway said. “Vic had the coaches stay home from the combine and spend one full week on the draft so all the coaches got all of their reports in on the players in this year’s draft.”

“So, I actually feel pretty good about where we are.”

Wimbledon canceled for 1st time since WWII

Associated Press

Wimbledon was canceled on Wednesday because of the coronavirus pandemic, the first time since World War II that the oldest Grand Slam tennis tournament won't be played.

Britain imposed a nationwide lockdown just over a week ago, and the All England Club announced after a two-day emergency meeting that the event it refers to simply as The Championships is being scrapped for 2020. That hadn't happened since 1945.

Wimbledon was scheduled to be played on the club's grass courts on the outskirts of London from June 29 to July 12.

Instead, the next edition of the tournament will be June 28 to July 11, 2021.

Eight-time Wimbledon champion Roger Federer surely spoke for many with a one-word message on Twitter: "Devastated."

Also Wednesday, the ATP and WTA announced that the

men's and women's professional tours would be suspended until at least July 13, bringing the number of elite tennis tournaments affected by the coronavirus to more than 30. The top tours already had been on hold through June 7. Lower-level events on the Challenger Tour and ITF World Tennis Tour also are called off through mid-July now.

Wimbledon first was held in 1877 and has been contested every year since, with the exception of two stretches: from 1915-18 because of World War I, and from 1940-45 because of World War II.

"It has weighed heavily on our minds that the staging of The Championships has only been interrupted previously by World Wars," club chairman Ian Hewitt said in a press release, "but, following thorough and extensive consideration of all scenarios, we believe that it is a measure of this global crisis that it is ultimately the

right decision to cancel this year's Championships, and instead concentrate on how we can use the breadth of Wimbledon's resources to help those in our local communities and beyond."

Wimbledon joins the growing list of sports events called off completely in 2020 because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

That includes the Tokyo Olympics — which have been pushed back 12 months — and the NCAA men's and women's college basketball tournaments.

Wimbledon is the first major tennis championship wiped out this year because of the coronavirus. The start of the French Open was postponed from late May to late September.

Shortly after the news came from Wimbledon, the U.S. Tennis Association issued a statement saying it "still plans to host the U.S. Open as scheduled," from Aug. 31 to Sept. 13 in New York.

Wednesday's decision by the All England Club means Novak Djokovic and Simona Halep will not get a chance to defend their Wimbledon titles from 2019.

"We are going through something bigger than tennis and Wimbledon will be back!" Halep wrote on social media. "And it means I have even longer to look forward to defending my title."

Serena Williams retweeted the club's message about the cancellation and wrote: "I'm Shooked."

The move also takes away what might have been one of Federer's best chances to try to add to his men's-record 20 Grand Slam titles.

Federer, who turns 39 in August, is currently recovering from knee surgery and planned to return in time for the European grass-court circuit that now has been erased from the calendar.

MLB vets getting \$4,775 daily until the season is underway

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Gerrit Cole, Mike Trout and other veteran major leaguers will receive \$4,775 per day in advance pay for the first 60 days of the season during the stoppage caused by the new coronavirus, a total of \$286,500.

That's just 2.5% of the \$193,548 the New York Yankees pitcher and Los Angeles Angels outfielder were scheduled to earn each day during the 186-day season from their \$36 million salaries, tied for the major league high this year.

The daily total was obtained by The Associated Press after it was confirmed by Major League Baseball and the players' association following their agreement last week on how to proceed during the stoppage.

Less veteran players re-

ceive smaller amounts specified in the agreement: \$16,500, \$30,000 or \$60,000, depending on the contract.

MLB has delayed opening day until mid-May at the earliest, and it remains unclear when or if the season will start.

On Wednesday, the two-game series in London between the Chicago Cubs and the St. Louis Cardinals was canceled because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The teams had been scheduled to play at Olympic Stadium on June 13-14.

Under the terms of the deal, teams are combining to give \$170 million in advance pay to players on 40-man rosters, injured lists and outright assignments to the minor leagues. The payments will be made in equal installments on the nor-

mal payroll schedule and do not have to be repaid if the season is scrapped. They cover from March 26, the original opening day, through May 24 or whenever the season starts, whichever is earlier.

A player receives \$275 daily if his salary while in the minors is \$46,000 to \$91,799, a group that includes highly touted rookies such as Boston infielder Bobby Dalbec and Atlanta outfielder Cristian Pache.

Those with salaries in the minors from \$91,800 to \$149,999, a group that has signed at least their second big league contract, get \$500 daily. Those players include well-regarded rookies such as Los Angeles Dodgers infielder Gavin Lux and Tampa Bay pitcher Brendan McKay.

NHL extends quarantine

Associated Press

The NHL has extended its guideline for players and staff to self-quarantine until April 15 and it is possible the coronavirus pandemic could push that back even further.

Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly confirmed the extension to the Associated Press on Tuesday. It adds an extra 11 days to the previous guidance of April 4, which Daly last week said was "a meaningless date" because of the changing situation.

"As we get closer to the date, we're going to have to make decisions as to what to do then," Daly said.

The NHL paused its season March 12 with 189 regular-season games remaining. Commissioner Gary Bettman said then he was optimistic of resuming the season and awarding the Stanley Cup.