

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

GIs, allies to practice landings on Guam

Associated Press

HAGATNA, Guam — Troops from the U.S., Japan and two European nations are gathering on remote U.S. islands in the Pacific for drills they say will show support for the free passage of vessels in international waters amid fears China could restrict movement in the South China Sea.

The drills around Guam and Tinian may also send a message to North Korea about the U.S. commitment to the region and the breadth of its allies. Tensions between the U.S. and North Korea spiked last month after Pyongyang launched a ballistic missile and the U.S.

sent an aircraft carrier strike group to the region.

The drills, which are led by France and include the United Kingdom, will practice amphibious landings, delivering forces by helicopter and urban patrols.

Two ships from France are participating, both of which are in the middle of a four-month deployment to the Indian and Pacific oceans. Joining are U.K. helicopters and 70 U.K. troops deployed with the French amphibious assault ship FS *Mistral*. Parts of the exercise will feature British helicopters taking U.S. Marines ashore from a French ship.

“The message we want to send is that we’re always ready to train and we’re always ready for the next crisis and humanitarian disaster wherever that may be,” said U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Kemper Jones, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment. About 100 Marines from Jones’ unit will be part of the drills slated for this weekend and next week.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea and has aggressively tried to fortify its foothold in recent years by transforming seven mostly submerged reefs into island outposts, some with runways and

radars and — more recently — weapons systems. This has prompted criticism from other nations, who also claim the atolls, and from the U.S., which insists on freedom of navigation in international waters.

Critics fear China’s actions could restrict movement in a key waterway for world trade and rich fishing grounds.

China says its island construction is mainly for civilian purposes, particularly to increase safety for ships. It has said it won’t interfere with freedom of navigation or overflight, although questions remain on whether that includes military ships and aircraft.

AF gives new moms more time to decide on staying

BY JESSICA BIDWELL

Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is giving airmen up to a year after giving birth to decide whether they want to stay in uniform.

The service, which previously required pregnant airmen to choose whether to separate before giving birth, announced the policy change last month.

A new mother now has 12 months after the birth of a child to decide whether to separate. The separation date can’t be more than 12 months after applying. The policy applies to active-duty, National Guard and Air Force Reserve mothers, the Air Force said.

The change means more decision time for Staff Sgt. Bethany Mutter, a dual-military wife serving on Okinawa who’s expecting her second child.

“My first child was a large adjustment. I wasn’t used to

having a kid and juggling the military,” she said. “I’m glad I stayed in, but it wasn’t easy. Now I am facing a whole new set of circumstances — another child in the military as a dual military couple.”

Mutter, who works with the 18th Medical Operations Squadron, said it’s a challenge raising children overseas.

“We have four months before the baby will be here, so we do have time to make a decision. ... I appreciate the peace of mind that this new policy has given us,” she said.

The change follows the Air Force’s extension last year of paid maternity leave from six to 12 weeks.

“I think the Air Force is heading in a very positive direction,” Mutter said. “We are becoming more family oriented. ... I think it will actually lead to more females entering the Air Force.”

N. Korea faces ‘shortfalls’ on nuke ICBMs, DOD says

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — North Korea still must overcome “important shortfalls” in developing a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile before it can field a weapon capable of hitting the U.S., according to the Pentagon’s intelligence agency.

Kim Jong Un’s regime “continues efforts to expand its stockpile of weapons-grade fissile materials,” but “there is still a lot of development needed before” it can deploy a weapon such as a mobile ICBM able to reach the U.S. mainland, Navy Cmdr. William Marks, a Defense Intelligence Agency spokesman, said via email.

The agency’s answers to questions about the nuclear program come as tensions on the Korean Peninsula remain high after Kim’s repeated weapons tests in violation of United Nations resolutions.

The agency didn’t address estimates by other analysts that North Korea will need until at least 2020 to develop an ICBM with a nuclear warhead capable of hitting the U.S. mainland. But it does suggest there’s still time for diplomacy or military action to prevent that from happening.

Despite continued progress on North Korea’s weapons program, missiles capable of reaching the U.S. “are extremely complex systems that require multiple flight tests to identify and correct design or manufacturing defects,” so “without flight tests, the KN-08’s reliability as a weapons system is low,” Marks said.

The KN-08 is the Pentagon’s designation for a North Korean missile that’s intended to have an estimated range of more than 3,400 miles and would be mounted on mobile launchers that are hard to track and detect.

USS Lincoln heads out for sea trials

(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

The aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln left Virginia's Newport News Shipbuilding Tuesday for sea trials after completing a mid-life overhaul that lasted more than four years.

The Lincoln arrived at the Newport News shipyard in March 2013 for a Refueling and Complex Overhaul, a massive upgrade and renovation that occurs halfway through the 50-year lifespan of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.

During the next few days, many of the ship's systems and technologies will be tested. Besides the ship's crew, those on-board include Newport News shipbuilders and personnel from Naval Sea Systems Command. According to a NAVSEA news release, the Lincoln will be the first carrier that can accommodate the new F-35C Lightning II strike fighter.

The shipyard, which built the Lincoln and all other U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, expects to re-deliver the Lincoln to the Navy later this month. That's according to Mike Petters, president and CEO of shipyard parent Huntington Ingalls Industries, who mentioned the Lincoln last week during a conference call with Wall Street analysts

Transgender cadets can graduate but won't serve

USA Today

WASHINGTON — Two transgender cadets — one each at the Air Force and Army academies — will be allowed to graduate this month after passing exams but will not be permitted to join the ranks of the military's newest officers, USA Today has learned.

The Air Force and the Army will not commission the cadets after graduation because the Pentagon has not established procedures for accepting new transgender troops into its ranks. The names and genders of the cadets were not released by the military. They still must pass exams in order to graduate.

Last year, then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter rescinded the Pentagon's ban on transgender troops. The policy immediately allowed transgender troops to serve openly. However, the policy for accepting new troops is scheduled to be developed and phased in this year.

"Currently, there is an Air Force Academy cadet who has identified as a transgender individual," said Lt. Col. Allen

Herritage, an academy spokesman. "The cadet can graduate. But, per the current (Defense Department) transgender policy, this cadet cannot commission into the Air Force. However, we are strongly recommending this individual for Air Force civil service as an option for continued service after the academy."

The Army also has a transgender cadet who is scheduled to graduate, pending final exams, but will be unable to join the active-duty ranks, said Cynthia Smith, an Army spokeswoman.

"We can confirm that a military academy cadet has identified as transgender, however, per the current Department of Defense medical accessions policy, this cadet cannot commission," Smith said in a statement.

West Point will not recognize the cadet's preferred gender at graduation, but instead the candidate's biological sex.

When Carter announced the ban was being dropped, he also issued guidance on how the military would develop its policy to accept and recruit transgender troops. Transgen-

der recruits and new officer candidates will be required to be certified by a doctor as stable in their preferred gender for 18 months before they can enter the military, according to Carter's directive.

But those policy guidelines were developed during Carter's tenure in the Obama administration, which also eliminated the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy. That rule banned gay and lesbian troops from serving openly. It's unclear how the Pentagon under Mattis will handle policies for transgender troops under the Trump administration.

There are as many as 6,600 transgender troops in the active-duty military force of about 1.3 million, according to Rand Corp. estimates. The annual price tag for the troops' treatment, ranging from counseling, hormone treatment and surgery, was put at between \$2.4 million and \$8.4 million, according to Rand.

By late last year, about 100 active-duty transgender troops had sought medical treatment under the policy.

Measles outbreak leads Army to call for vaccinations

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Amid an ongoing measles outbreak in Europe, U.S. Army health officials on the Continent are now recommending that Defense Department dependents get immunized against measles starting at 6 months old.

The measles, mumps and rubella vaccine will now be in-

cluded as part of the routine 6-month-old visit with a child's pediatrician, Regional Health Command Europe said in a release. Parents still will be able to decide whether their children receive the vaccine then, RHCE spokesman Gino Mattorano said, but it's being highly encouraged. The 6-month-old MMR shot would be in addition to the two doses children normally receive starting after their first birthday, officials said.

The new guidelines, issued last week, come about two weeks after the command put out an advisory about the outbreak. The latest message "is a little more specific," Mattorano said on Thursday. The command is now saying "if you have kids in that age group, we really want you to get them immunized."

Romania and Italy have been hit the hardest by measles, but cases have been reported in at least 14 additional countries, in-

cluding Germany, Belgium and France.

So far this spring, there have been no confirmed cases of measles among DOD families in Europe, Mattorano said. But on May 4, there was a suspected case of measles in a 2-year-old family member enrolled at the SHAPE Child Development Center in Belgium, he said. The child has been isolated while officials await test results, Mattorano said.

Mattis affirms US' commitment to a wary Turkey

Associated Press

LONDON — Pentagon chief Jim Mattis on Thursday made clear that America is committed to protecting Turkey, a NATO ally upset the Trump administration has agreed to arm anti-Islamic State fighters in Syria that Turkey considers terrorists.

Mattis stressed the enduring nature of the U.S.-Turkey relationship in a meeting with Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, the first face-to-face contact between officials from the two countries since the U.S. announcement about military support for the Syrian Kurds.

In talks that Pentagon chief spokeswoman Dana White described as good and calm, the officials reaffirmed their support for peace and stability in Iraq and Syria.

The U.S. is convinced that the Kurdish fighters, known as the YPG, are the most effective local force in trying to oust ISIS militants from their stronghold in Raqqa, Syria. Turkey wants the arms agreement reversed, and Yildirim on Wednesday said the U.S. cannot use one terrorist group to fight another.

Mattis and Yildirim met for about 30 minutes before the start of an international conference in London on security threats and humanitarian crises in Somalia.

A senior American official said the U.S. will step up joint intelligence-sharing with the Turks in an effort to help them better target terrorists.

NATO chief sees quick decision on joining coalition

BERLIN — NATO's secretary-general said Thursday that he hopes for a decision by the time member countries' leaders meet May 25 on whether the alliance formally joins the coalition fighting Islamic State.

The U.S. under President Donald Trump is keen for a greater emphasis on NATO in fighting terrorism. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg said that all members of the 28-nation alliance are already members of the anti-ISIS coalition, though NATO, itself, formally isn't.

"The question is whether NATO as an alliance should be at the table coordinating with the others, or whether we should continue to provide support to the coalition," Stoltenberg said after meeting with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

From The Associated Press

Experts: US must be savvy in cyber ops to deter Russia

BY ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

The United States must demonstrate its cyber warfare capabilities to help deter sophisticated attacks from Russia and other adversaries while building strategies on a battlefield still misunderstood by commanders and senior officials, a panel of defense experts told lawmakers Thursday.

"Cyberoperations are a legitimate means of projecting national power, especially when proportionately supplemented by kinetic force, and we should advertise them accordingly," retired Navy Adm. James Stavridis, the former leader of European Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in prepared remarks.

Russia, North Korea, China and other nations launch sophisticated attacks against the U.S., including attempts to destroy infrastructure and undermine credibility of elections in America and France, Stavridis said. And the U.S. is often sheepish to strike back in shows of force, he added.

"Unwillingness to operate offensively in cyberspace is driven less by a fear of retaliation and more by a fear of compromising our intelligence community's sensitive tradecraft," he said.

Retired Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden, former director of the CIA, said there is still a lack of consensus in the U.S. and the international community about what kinds of attacks warrant a response, and outdated thinking still suggests cyberattacks require an in-kind digital response, when other measures, such as conventional military strikes or sanctions, might be more appropriate.

"One way to recognize practice is to practice," Hayden said.

In response to Russian election interference for example, the U.S. could have disrupted bank accounts linked to Russian oligarchs and revealed the extent of President Vladimir Putin's finances and property, Stavridis said.

Recent protests have rocked Russia following allegations of embezzlement by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, and overt jabs over the wealth of Russian leaders would undermine the government there, he said.

Crippling intelligence-gathering networks would also restrict Putin's ability to surveil his own people, Hayden said, at a crucial time when he seeks to squash dissent.

James Clapper, former director of national intelligence, stressed throughout the hearing about shortfalls within the government to anticipate the response of adversar-

ies once cyberoperations are launched.

"We can't count on equal or symmetrical retaliation," he said.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., the committee's chairman, opened his remarks for the hearing with a quip signaling his frustration with a lack of vision and cohesion in cyberoperations in the military and intelligence communities.

"The committee meets today to receive testimony on cyber policy, strategy and organization, of which there is very little," McCain said.

His remarks are an echo of a hearing held Tuesday, when McCain said: "Our nation remains woefully unprepared to address these threats."

The panel offered various reasons why the U.S. appears unprepared to strike and vulnerable to attack in cyberspace. Chief among them is a lack of coherent guidance and command that is spread throughout the military branches and intelligence agencies, which results in redundancies and overlap.

Clapper and other officials have urged the separation of the National Security Agency and Cyber Command, the so-called "dual hat" organization led by Navy Adm. Michael Rogers, that has become too big for one commander, Clapper said.

Those organizations have different missions — Cyber Command focuses on offensive and defensive strikes while NSA's main efforts are in spying and intelligence-gathering, Stavridis said. Elevating the cyberspace mission to full combatant command would crystalize doctrine and would send a message to adversaries on the seriousness of the U.S. to execute missions, he said.

The experts and members of the committee voiced the need for President Donald Trump to provide guidance in cyberoperations after he missed a self-imposed deadline to deliver a strategy within 90 days of his inauguration. Shortly after the hearing concluded, Trump signed an executive order "aimed at strengthening the federal government's cybersecurity and protecting the nation's critical infrastructure from cyberattacks," Reuters reported Thursday.

McCain reiterated concerns recently voiced by service chiefs that a disparate focus and investment in cyberwarriors in the military leaves talent untapped and later poached by the private sector.

"I don't see a clear career path for cyberwarriors," he said.

Stavridis said none of the 126 airmen who recently completed their first tour with the Pentagon's cyberspace mission force were retained for a second tour.

Panel subpoenas Flynn for documents in probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate intelligence committee has subpoenaed former Trump national security adviser Michael Flynn for documents related to the panel's investigation into Russia's election meddling.

Sen. Richard Burr, the Republican chairman, and Sen. Mark Warner, the committee's Democratic vice chairman, issued a joint statement Wednesday saying the panel decided to issue the subpoena after Flynn, through his lawyer, declined to cooperate with an April 28 request to turn over the documents.

Flynn and other associates of President Donald Trump have received similar requests from the committee for information and documents during the past few weeks.

Copies of request letters sent to longtime Trump associate Roger Stone and former Trump foreign policy adviser Carter Page were shared with The Associated Press. Those letters, which were nearly identical, sought emails, text messages, letters, phone records or any other relevant information they have about meetings or contacts that they or any other individual affiliated with the Trump campaign had with Russian officials or representatives of Russian business interests. They also ask for information about any financial or real estate holdings related to Russia, including any since divested or sold.

The requests sent to Stone and Page covered documents

and information from June 2015 through Jan. 20 of this year. During that period, Flynn accepted tens of thousands of dollars from a Russian state-sponsored television network. He later worked as a foreign agent on behalf of a Turkish businessman while serving as a top Trump campaign adviser. It also covers the postelection time period in which Trump and his transition team decided to appoint Flynn as national security adviser.

Stone said Thursday that he will "fully comply" with the Senate Intelligence Committee's request for documents relating to its Russia investigation.

The subpoena comes as both the Senate committee and its counterpart in the House are investigating Russia's interference in the 2016 election and whether Trump associates colluded with those attempts to sway the election. Flynn's Russia ties also are being scrutinized by the FBI as it conducts a similar investigation.

Other congressional committees and the Pentagon's inspector general are also separately examining whether Flynn was fully forthcoming about his foreign contacts and earnings from organizations linked to the governments of Russia and Turkey.

The top Democrat and Republican on a House oversight committee have said Flynn likely broke federal law by failing to get approval from the U.S. government to accept foreign payments and not disclosing them after accepting them.

Acting FBI chief contradicts White House on Comey

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe undermined recent White House explanations about the firing of FBI Director James Comey during testimony before a Senate committee Thursday.

Since President Donald Trump's surprise ouster of Comey on Tuesday, the White House has justified his decision, in part, by saying that the director had lost the confidence of the rank and file of the FBI as well as the public in general.

"That is not accurate," McCabe said in a response to a senator's question about the White House assertions. "I can tell you also that Director Comey enjoyed broad support within the FBI and still does to this day."

The firing of Comey left the fate of the FBI's probe into Russia's election meddling and possible ties to the Trump campaign uncertain. The investigation has shadowed Trump from the outset of his presidency, though he's denied any ties to Russia or knowledge of any campaign coordination with Moscow.

McCabe called the investigation "highly significant" and assured senators Comey's firing will not hinder it. He promised

he would tolerate no interference from the White House and would not provide the administration with updates.

Days before he was fired, Comey requested more resources to pursue his investigation, U.S. officials said, fueling concerns that Trump was trying to undermine a probe that could threaten his presidency. McCabe said the Russia investigation is adequately resourced.

The White House appeared caught off guard by the intense response to Comey's firing, given that the FBI director had become a pariah among Democrats for his role in the Clinton investigation. In defending the decision, officials leaned heavily on a memo from Rosenstein, the deputy attorney general, criticizing Comey's handling of the Clinton investigation.

But Rosenstein's own role in Comey's firing became increasingly murky Wednesday.

It's unclear whether Rosenstein was aware his report would be used to justify the director's ouster.

A farewell letter from Comey that circulated among friends and colleagues said he does not plan to dwell on the decision to fire him nor on "the way it was executed."

New Orleans removes statue of Confederate president

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Workers wearing bulletproof vests removed the statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in New Orleans before dawn Thursday.

The statue was the second of four Confederate monuments slated for removal.

As the statue was lifted from its perch on a median along one of the city's main thoroughfares, a cheer went up from some of the protesters on the scene who have been

pushing for the monument's removal.

Removal of the statue — a larger-than-life image of Davis atop an ornate granite pedestal roughly 15-feet high — follows recent protests at the site by supporters and opponents of the monuments. City officials had refused to give advance public notice of the work because of threats of violence against contractors and workers involved in the effort. The statue was first unveiled in 1911.

Dozens of protesters both supporting the

monuments and calling for their removal stayed up overnight to watch the proceedings, which happened in early morning darkness. The demonstrators, who were separated by metal barriers set up by the police, heckled each other. About 50 police officers encircled the monument and kept watch on the protesters.

As preparation for removing the Davis statue, workers had wrapped the torso in green bubble wrap and then placed a harness attached to a crane around the statue.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Former day care worker in controversy has died

PA ALLENTOWN — A former Pennsylvania day care worker charged with coaxing 3- and 4-year-old children to use obscenities on camera has died while awaiting trial.

Sean Poll, the attorney for Rashanna Gyles, 25, told The (Easton) Express-Times that Gyles died April 28 from unspecified health problems and was buried May 3. She'd been awaiting trial on a misdemeanor count of corruption of minors.

Lehigh County prosecutors say Gyles, a bus monitor at Creative Minds Daycare Academy in Allentown, had a half-dozen children direct obscenities toward another child then made videos of that and sent one to a friend, which wound up on Facebook.

State prison inmates to get tablet computers

SD PIERRE — Every state prison inmate in South Dakota will soon have their own tablet computer.

Taxpayers won't be footing the bill for the touchscreen tablets. They are being given to the Department of Corrections by telephone provider Global Tel Link. The devices are connected to a closed network, so inmates won't be logging on to Facebook, Twitter or surfing the internet.

The Argus Leader reported that for a charge, inmates will be able to talk to and text family and friends, although no photos or attachments are allowed. They'll also have paid access to games.

Corrections officials say distribution to men's prisons in Rapid City, Yankton, Springfield and Sioux Falls should be

completed by mid-June. Female inmates in Pierre already have the tablets.

Garden State could be official state slogan

NJ TRENTON — The Garden State could become New Jersey's official state slogan.

A state Senate committee on Monday advanced a bill that would adopt the phrase, which has been on the state's license plates since the 1950s.

Democratic Sen. Jim Whelan said a Girl Scout troop proposed the idea after discovering the state did not have a slogan written into law.

The bill's sponsors say the phrase was first made popular during a speech by Camden attorney and farmer Abraham Browning at the Philadelphia Centennial exhibition in 1876.

Woman sues in firing over a birthday cake

NY NEW YORK — A New York woman suing her former employer says she was fired because of her mistreatment of a piece of birthday cake in the office refrigerator.

Nicole Brunner filed a lawsuit against the Madwell ad agency for unspecified damages, saying the company unfairly fired her.

Brunner told the New York Post that her ex-boyfriend, who was also employed at Madwell, threw a brick through her bedroom window after she broke up with him last year. He pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct but he wasn't fired from the company.

Brunner then took a piece of his birthday cake from the office fridge, an incident that led him to confront Brunner. He was then fired from the agency.

Madwell says it fired Brunner for lying about taking the cake and then threatening another employee, which Brunner denies.

Plane clips trailer on approach to airport

OH FREMONT — A truck driver who heard a strange thud while driving down an Ohio highway said he pulled over to find landing gear sticking out of his trailer after it was clipped by a small plane making a low approach.

No one was injured in the collision near the Fremont airport Tuesday. The pilot of the plane landed the aircraft on its belly.

Truck driver Russ Street pulled over at the airport, thinking he might have blown a tire, and saw a small tire sticking out of the top of his trailer.

State police said it's unclear why the plane was coming in low. They said the pilot, John Randall, 71, was out for a practice flight.

Suspect found, cited for graffiti on rocks

HI HONOLULU — Authorities have found the woman suspected of painting graffiti on a mountain held sacred by Native Hawaiians.

The state Department of Land and Natural Resources said Tuesday the Native Hawaiian community helped officers contact the woman, who was issued a citation.

Grffiti was found on rocks last month in the Mauna Kea Ice Age Natural Reserve Area. There was also graffiti on a portable restroom and other areas of Mauna Kea.

Protesters have been fighting to stop a giant telescope from being built on the mountain. Protest leaders condemned the vandalism, saying it amounts to desecration.

Supplier to pay \$1M for penis pump claims

KS KANSAS CITY — A Kansas medical equipment supplier has agreed to pay \$1 million to settle allegations that it submitted false claims to Medicare for vacuum erection devices that are known informally as penis pumps.

The U.S. attorney's office announced the settlement with Pos-T-Vac Inc. on Monday. Allegations against the Dodge City company include that it submitted claims for vacuum erection supplies that weren't medically necessary, lacked documentation of medical necessity and weren't properly ordered by a physician. The issues are alleged to have occurred from 2009 through 2012.

Medicare has since stopped covering such devices.

Girl, 10, uses fingers to escape an alligator

FL ORLANDO — A 10-year-old Florida girl says she shoved her fingers up an alligator's snout to escape after the almost-9-foot-long reptile bit her.

Juliana Ossa on Monday told Orlando television station WKMG-TV that she learned the escape trick from visiting a local alligator park, Gatorland.

The girl was sitting in water roughly 2 feet deep when the gator bit her on her knee and calf at Moss Park in the Orlando area on Saturday.

In a 911 call released Monday, a caller describes Juliana as having puncture wounds to her leg.

She was treated at a nearby hospital for non-life-threatening wounds.

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Penguins advance past Caps

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Marc-Andre Fleury and his teammates played their best game of the playoffs so far, and it feels like just the beginning for the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The defending Stanley Cup champions beat the Washington Capitals 2-0 in Game 7 with their strongest 60-minute performance yet thanks in large part to Fleury's 29 saves. But with the Ottawa Senators up next in the Eastern Conference finals, the scary part for the other teams left may be that Pittsburgh is just now finding its groove.

"I think we can play a lot better," veteran center Matt Cullen said. "As a group, we know there's another gear, and I think we're all just really happy we get a chance to find it in this next series."

Game 1 against Ottawa will be Saturday night in Pittsburgh.

The Penguins have been without defenseman Kris Letang and starting goaltender Matt Murray. Defenseman Trevor Daley and forward Carl Hagelin are also injured. Sidney Crosby was out briefly with a concussion. Yet Pittsburgh showed the resilience of a champion in closing out the Presidents' Trophy-winning Capitals.

The Penguins have proved they can rise to any challenge, no matter how big.

"A lot of us have played together and been through some big games together, so I think there's a certain level of trust and belief," Crosby said. "You still got to go out there and do it. That doesn't guarantee anything."

The second-round series against Washington felt like the Stanley Cup Final, with the winner emerging as the title favorite. The battered Penguins now face a different kind of challenge in the East final against Ottawa.

"They've got some depth," Crosby said of the Senators. "They're very confident in their game right now. They're pretty stingy defensively and their goaltender's been playing really well. They believe in their group and the way they play, and it'll be a good test for us."

Pittsburgh has passed every test so far, winning despite being outshot by the Columbus Blue Jackets in the first round and then by the Capitals. Fleury is 8-4 with a 2.55 goals-against average and .927 save percentage.

"That's what it takes to win at this time of year," Sullivan said of Fleury's Game 7 shutout. "That's what it takes to win championships. And this guy is a battle-tested guy."

Battle-tested from a trip to the 2008 Cup Final and a victory there in 2009 and by being supplanted by Murray. Fleury's resurgence is reason enough for the Penguins to believe they can win it all again, but there are plenty of others, most notably the depth that Pittsburgh can rely on amid a torrent of injuries.

"We've been through so much the last two years here," forward Patric Hornqvist said. "It's been injuries, up and down to almost not making the playoffs and then we go and win the Cup. And now we have our backs against the wall again and we come up with the best game so far of the season. ... We trust ourselves in here."

There's no lack of trust or belief in the Penguins locker room, not even after losing consecutive games to cough up a 3-1 series lead to the Capitals. When Washington seemed to have all the momentum, the Penguins punched back. Now they're eight victories away from another Cup.

"They showed a lot of resiliency," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. "You can see why they have a pedigree of a Stanley Cup champion."

Washington comes up short again

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — They spoke in hushed, halting tones. They shook their heads a lot.

And with three simple words, used in response to various questions in the postgame locker room — "I don't know" — goaltender Braden Holtby seemed to capture the grasping-for-answers way the Washington Capitals felt after their season ended with a 2-0 loss to Marc-Andre Fleury and the Pittsburgh Penguins in Game 7 of their Eastern Conference semifinal Wednesday night.

Yes, it was the end, and a familiar one at that. But not just of a season. Or of a second-round series — yet again. Or via a Game 7 loss — yet again. This, quite possibly, could signal the end of an era, one featuring so much promise and potential thanks to Alex Ovechkin and others but so little to show for it.

"You don't get many teams that win the Presidents' Cup as many times as we have here and be part of an organization that does whatever it takes to win," defenseman Karl Alzner said. "We honestly thought that we were the best team in the playoffs and showed little flashes of it. So when you don't even get past the second round, it's just extreme disappointment."

It was the second year in a row that Ovechkin and Co. had the NHL's best regular-season record but exited in the second round of the playoffs against Pittsburgh. During Ovechkin's career, they have now played in 10 Game 7s, going 3-7.

This offseason could mark a big shift for the franchise.

Top line right wing T.J. Oshie — who tied Ovechkin for the team lead in goals this season — and another couple of forwards, Justin Williams and Daniel Winnik, along with defensemen Alzner and Kevin Shattenkirk are unrestricted free agents. Evgeny Kuznetsov, Andre Burakovsky and Dmitry Orlov are restricted free agents.

Ducks get it done in Game 7

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Nick Ritchie is an NHL playoff newcomer. The 21-year-old power forward wasn't around for any of the Anaheim Ducks' agonizing Game 7 defeats over the past four seasons.

So when he found a patch of open ice during the third period Wednesday night, Ritchie could let fly with a beautiful shot, his wrists unencumbered by the weight of history.

After four years of agony and over a decade of fruitless Game 7s, the Ducks are finally the victors of a winner-take-all game — and now they're half-

way to another Stanley Cup.

Ritchie scored the tiebreaker, John Gibson made 23 saves and the Ducks ended their streak of five straight Game 7 losses with a 2-1 victory over the Edmonton Oilers, advancing to the Western Conference finals for the second time in three years.

Andrew Cogliano scored the tying goal midway through the second period for the Ducks, who had blown a 3-2 series lead and lost a Game 7 on home ice in four consecutive seasons.

The Ducks fell behind the Oilers just 3:31 into this seventh game, but the rest of the night largely belonged to Anaheim, which finally showed some vet-

eran mettle in the playoffs' biggest crucible.

"We were down 1-0 for a little bit, and we didn't panic," Ritchie said. "We actually started to play better once they scored, and we got another one and then we kind of brought it home with good defensive hockey."

Ritchie beat Cam Talbot 3:21 into the third period, his second career playoff goal putting the Ducks ahead in a Game 7 for the first time in five years — and ahead of the Oilers for the first time in nearly 193 minutes since late in Game 4.

Anaheim will host the Nashville Predators in Game 1 of the conference finals Friday night.

Celtics power past Wizards in Game 5

Associated Press

BOSTON — Playing in the Garden has brought out the Boston Celtics' best basketball this postseason.

Wednesday night it was home to one of the best nights of Avery Bradley's career.

Bradley scored a playoff career-high 29 points, and the Celtics beat the Washington Wizards 123-101 to take a 3-2 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

After being thoroughly picked apart in losses at Washington in Games 3 and 4, Boston shared the ball in Game 5, and again resembled the team that entered the game having won seven straight and 11 of 13 in the Garden against Washington.

Al Horford scored 19 points, seven assists, and six rebounds. Isaiah Thomas added 18 points and dished nine assists.

"We're a team. And it's going to take a team effort to beat the Washington Wizards," Bradley said.

Game 6 is Friday night in Washington, where the Wizards easily won their two games. If the Celtics win, they would move on to host the Cleveland Cavaliers to open

the Eastern Conference finals.

Game 7 would be in Boston on Monday.

Boston led by as many as 26 points, negating Washington's physicality by spreading the floor and knocking down 16 three-pointers.

John Wall had 21 for the Wizards, who haven't won a playoff game in Boston since 1982.

The Wizards scored the first four points of the game, but that was followed by 16-0 run by the Celtics.

"The great start kind of got us going on both ends of the floor," Bradley said. "Tonight we saw if we're able to start the right way, the game's in our control."

It marked the fourth time in the series that one team has had a run of at least 16-0, including three times in the first quarter. Washington had a 16-0 spurt to start Game 1, a 22-0 run in Game 3 and 26-0 burst in Game 4.

During Boston's first-quarter spurt Wednesday, the Wizards missed eight straight shots before it was ended by Otto Porter's basket.

Boston did a good job of sharing the ball,

getting assists on 12 of 13 baskets in the opening 12 minutes. Thomas had five assists, more than Washington's entire team (four) in the period.

The Celtics also outrebounded the Wizards 48-45, after being outrebounded by 26 boards through each of the previous two games (95-69).

"They were the more physical team today," Wall said. "Throughout this whole series, whoever's the most physical team has won every game."

Thomas said one thing that became apparent in watching film from the Celtics' losses in Games 3 and 4 was that he had to adjust his game with three or four defenders guarding him.

He said he's found maturity to step back and not force plays that he might not have had earlier in his career.

"Now I'm seeing the game differently," Thomas said. "But at the same time, that's not going to stop me from being aggressive and trying to make plays, not just for myself but for my teammates as well."

Brown blends style into Warriors' system

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — They often hear him arrive at work from upstairs in the Warriors executive offices, the thundering vroom of his Harley Davidson a telltale sign.

Mike Brown rolled in on his Bay Area bike — he has another in Cleveland — one day last week, and since the practice he was leading between playoff games would be short, he never bothered to change out of his beige Harley-logo T-shirt and dark jeans.

Somehow, the veteran NBA coach filling in for the Warriors has found a way to beautifully blend being his distinctive self with carrying on the way reigning NBA Coach of the Year Steve Kerr would do it if he were here and healthy.

Brown still works out Draymond Green daily on a court in the far corner of Golden State's practice facility, almost as if nothing has changed in his position.

"It's a tough balance," two-

time reigning MVP Stephen Curry said. "Obviously Coach Kerr has set up an atmosphere and a way of doing things here that's worked and been successful. When he hired Coach Brown, Coach Brown aligned right with that kind of idea. Coach Brown's done a great job so far just, respectful is a word, but taking ownership of the opportunity right now to get over this next challenge. He obviously has Coach in his ear all the time, and that's how it should be, but he's got to have confidence in himself and in his own mind and what he sees out there to make decisions on the fly and push the right buttons in games and make the right adjustments.

"He's done a great job of that ever since Game 3 in Portland. I'm sure that will continue."

The 2009 NBA Coach of the Year with the Cavaliers, Brown has embraced getting another shot on the bench with an uber-talented team like Golden State — and wow has he coached some of the game's biggest

stars along the way, from LeBron James to Kobe Bryant to now Curry and Kevin Durant.

As the unbeaten Warriors prepare for the Western Conference finals against either Houston or San Antonio, this is a moment Brown knows won't last. Kerr, who had another procedure last Friday for a spinal fluid leak, could come back before the postseason ends. But he might not.

The 51-year-old Kerr missed the first 43 games during last season's run to a record 73 victories, including an NBA-best 24-0 start as now-Lakers coach Luke Walton guided Golden State to a 39-4 record in his absence. Brown and Kerr talk and text regularly to plan practice or scout opponents.

"Steve has done a fantastic job laying a great foundation down culturally and X's and O's basketball-wise," Brown said. "We have a great staff. The staff has helped out tremendously and (GM) Bob Myers and his group, the leaders on the team, the veterans that we have. Everybody

has kind of pitched in to help us keep heading in the right direction during this time."

Brown has learned not to get too high or too low. He has been through the ringer losing his job in Cleveland only to come back, being let go by the Lakers and even facing a frightening situation last May putting out a kitchen fire in his home that left him scarred from all the burns.

Brown could end up coaching against the Cavs in the NBA Finals after guiding them to the playoffs in all five seasons during his first stint there from 2005-10.

Each day at Golden State headquarters, there is Brown going about leading Green through his post-practice individual work.

"It's extremely important. I still have a role to do," Brown said Wednesday. "Steve's the head coach. So I'm going to keep doing it. That's not going to change for me."

Ex-Oriole Wieters leads Nats past O's

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It was payback time for Matt Wieters and the Washington Nationals.

Wieters hit a winning, two-run single in the bottom of the ninth inning against his former team, and the Nationals rallied to beat Baltimore 7-6 on Wednesday night and end the Orioles' six-game winning streak.

After losing twice in Baltimore, the first-place Nationals trailed 6-2 in the seventh inning at their own ballpark and were in danger of extending their losing streak.

"We certainly didn't want to lose four in a row," manager Dusty Baker said. "That would have negated all the work we'd done prior to that."

Instead, Washington used a three-run ninth to earn a feel-good victory.

"We needed a win, we had

played poorly the first two games all around," Wieters said. "The fact they kicked our butts there, you want to come back and beat them."

Down by two in the ninth, the Nationals rallied against Brad Brach (0-1), who is serving as Baltimore's closer while Zach Britton is on the disabled list.

Jayson Werth led off the ninth with a homer to end an 11-pitch at-bat and begin Brach's downfall.

Bryce Harper doubled, and with one out, an intentional walk and a single loaded the bases. Wieters stepped in and hit a liner to right to win it.

Wieters signed with Washington in February following an eight-year run with Baltimore. Suffice to say he knew all about Brach, his former batterymate.

"It's tough facing a guy you threw so many innings to. He kind of knows everything you're throwing," Brach said.

"He put a good swing on it."

Brach was wildly successful as a setup man last season, but now he's Baltimore's closer. He's 8-for-10 thus far, and it hasn't been easy.

"I've been trying to do my best to not think about the inning," he said. "I just think it's not really executing more than anything else."

Matt Albers (2-0) — another former Oriole — struck out three straight batters for the win.

Mark Trumbo and Manny Machado homered for the Orioles, who built a seemingly comfortable lead against Stephen Strasburg.

Trumbo struck out twice against Strasburg before launching a two-run shot to deep center to put Baltimore on top 5-1 in the fifth. It was only the fourth long ball of the season for Trumbo, the defending major league home run leader.

Machado hit his ninth homer off Blake Treinen in the seventh.

Orioles starter Wade Miley needed 119 pitches to get 15 outs, but he left with a 5-2 lead after striking out five and walking four. In his previous start, the left-hander was pulled in the first inning after consecutive batters struck him with line drives.

Strasburg struck out nine over six innings but gave up five runs and eight hits, both season highs.

Michael Taylor homered and had three RBIs for the Nationals.

Nationals cleanup hitter Ryan Zimmerman went 0-for-5, striking out twice and grounding into a double play. He came into the series with a 13-game hitting streak, but went hitless Monday in the opener and is 1-for-14 in the series.

Rangers top Padres after getting three runs on no hits

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Delino DeShields took two hard steps toward home plate. He then got to jog in from third base with the tying run for the Texas Rangers after a balk.

Two innings later, DeShields scored on a wild pitch in the seventh that gave Texas a 4-3 victory over the San Diego Padres on Wednesday night.

In a game that the Rangers were 1-for-13 with runners in scoring position, they also scored on a wild pitch.

"It wasn't necessarily pretty offensively, but however you get an opportunity to capitalize on some situations, balls put in play," manager Jeff Banister said.

DeShields drew a one-out walk from reliever Brad Hand (0-2) in the seventh before Shin-Soo Choo also walked. Elvis Andrus then hit a potential double-play grounder, but second baseman Yangervis

Solarte's wide throw to first went into the camera well.

Mariners 11, Phillies 1: Carlos Ruiz hit a three-run double against his old team while Robinson Cano and Danny Valencia homered for visiting Seattle.

Rockies 3, Cubs 0: German Marquez (1-2) allowed three hits over eight innings, struck out eight and got his first major league hit with a two-run single in the seventh off Kyle Hendricks (2-2) for host Colorado.

Giants 6, Mets 5: Hunter Pence hit a tying single and Christian Arroyo had a three-run double against Jeurys Familia (1-1) in a four-run ninth as visiting San Francisco, a major league-worst 12-23, took advantage of third baseman Wilmer Flores' error to stop a five-game losing streak.

Astros 4, Braves 2: Carlos Correa had two doubles and two RBIs for host Houston, off to its best 34-game start at 23-11. Correa's fifth-inning double off Jaime Garcia (1-2) drove in

two runs for a 3-2 lead.

Athletics 3, Angels 1: Andrew Triggs (5-2) walked his first three batters on 14 pitches and allowed Jefry Marte to hit into an RBI forceout but lasted six innings and didn't allow another run. Liam Hendriks, Ryan Madson and Santiago Casilla finished the four-hitter for host Oakland, with Casilla striking out his first two batters in a one-hit ninth for his sixth save.

Blue Jays 8, Indians 7: Ryan Goins singled home the winning run off Cody Allen (0-1) in the ninth, capping host Toronto's comeback from a 7-3, third-inning deficit.

Rays 12, Royals 1: Chris Archer (3-1) allowed five hits in eight shutout innings to win for the first time in five starts since April 14 and help host Tampa Bay stop a three-game losing streak.

Cardinals 7, Marlins 5: Pinch-hitter Dexter Fowler, out of the starting lineup for the past

six games because of a sore lat, hit a go-ahead, two-run triple in the sixth off Jarlin Garcia (0-1) as visiting St. Louis overcame a four-run deficit for the second game in a row. Fowler drove in the go-ahead run in the ninth inning Tuesday after St. Louis rallied from a 5-1 eighth-inning deficit.

Dodgers 5, Pirates 2: Kenta Maeda pitched into the ninth inning while Cody Bellinger homered and made a tumbling catch in left field as host Los Angeles beat Pittsburgh to complete a three-game sweep.

Diamondbacks 7, Tigers 1: Zack Godley allowed four hits in seven innings after being called up from Triple-A in time to make his second start of the season as host Arizona ended a three-game losing streak.

Brewers 7, Red Sox 4: Keon Broxton and Eric Thames had two hits each and set the tone in a four-run fifth inning.