

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, May 13, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

US to ask NATO for additional troops

By TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States will ask other NATO countries to send thousands of additional troops to Afghanistan to help train and advise Afghan forces and assist the U.S.-led counterterrorism effort there, the top U.S. general said.

Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will travel to Brussels on Monday for meetings with the defense chiefs of the other 27 NATO countries. He plans to make the case to alliance members that it is critical to increase military pressure against the Taliban and other terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan to prevent the country's security from deteriorating further.

The request for more troops is to help meet unfulfilled NATO requirements in Afghanistan identified by Army Gen. John Nicholson, the commander of the alliance's train-and-advise mission there, Dunford said.

"There are two missions there — there's the counterter-

rorism mission and then there's the training mission, obviously a NATO mission," Dunford said. "NATO ... didn't meet the full [requirement]."

As of March, there were 13,459 troops in Afghanistan supporting the train-and-advise operation, known as Resolute Support. The 27 other NATO nations provided 4,876 troops combined to Resolute Support, while the United States contributed 6,941 troops, according to alliance data. Another 1,642 troops were provided to the mission by nations that are not part of NATO. "The optimal NATO mission was going to be 15,000," Dunford said.

In addition, the United States contributes about 2,000 troops to Operation Freedom's Sentinel, the counterterrorism operation against al Qaeda, the Islamic State and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

Dunford said NATO also could be asked to contribute troops to the counterterrorism mission. He had said previously that he and Defense Secretary

Jim Mattis had initially thought the Pentagon would present its 2017 Afghanistan plan to President Donald Trump prior to the Brussels meeting. But the meeting with Trump has not occurred yet, said Navy Capt. Greg Hicks, a spokesman for Dunford.

More so, the request for additional NATO support will go beyond more troops and defense leaders at the Brussels meeting will also look to identify other ways that countries can contribute to the missions in Afghanistan, Dunford said.

"We're looking at a way of achieving an effect," he said. "And this is not just in the context of how many forces are needed. This is analyzing what were the factors [that led to] Afghan security forces casualties last year and challenges they had from the Taliban. So, first look at that and say what are the range of things we could do."

Hicks said other contributions might include, for example, additional helicopter squadrons to provide aviation support for the

Afghan army. The new plan for Afghanistan could also include allowing advisers to be inserted into smaller-sized units of advancing Afghan forces on the ground, Dunford said. Up to this point, advisers have been teamed with larger conventional Afghan forces or smaller special operations units.

"Gen. Nicholson has expeditionary advisory packages — advisers, joint tactical air controllers, security people, helicopters — so it's a package — it can go wherever he wants it to go," Dunford said.

After 16 years of fighting in Afghanistan, Dunford acknowledged war fatigue is an issue facing the United States and NATO countries when deciding to send more troops to the country.

"We can be tired, but war is a clash of wills," he said. "Who wins and who loses? Who loses is whose will is lost first. And I think what we need to be mindful of is not how long we have been there, but what's the remaining threat to the United States and coalition partners."

UK hospitals among targets of global cyberattacks

Associated Press

LONDON — Britain's National Cyber Security Center said Saturday teams are working "round the clock" to restore hospital computer systems after a global cyberattack that hit dozens of countries forced British hospitals to cancel and delay treatment for patients.

In Russia, where a wide array of systems came under attack, officials said services had been restored or the virus contained.

The extortion attack, which locked up computers and held users' files for ransom, was believed the biggest of its kind

ever recorded, disrupting services from the U.S. to Russia, Spain and India.

It appeared to exploit a vulnerability purportedly identified for use by the U.S. National Security Agency and later leaked to the internet.

Two security firms — Kaspersky Lab and Avast — said they had identified the malicious software behind the attack in upward of 70 countries, although both said the attack has hit Russia the hardest.

The Russian Interior Ministry, which runs the country's police, confirmed it was among

those that fell victim to the "ransomware," which typically flashes a message demanding payment to release the user's data. Spokeswoman Irina Volk was quoted by the Interfax news agency Saturday as saying the problem had been "localized" and that no information was compromised.

A spokesman for the Russian Health Ministry, Nikita Odintsov, said on Twitter that the cyberattacks on his ministry were "effectively repelled." The national railway system said that although it was attacked, rail network operations were

unaffected.

British Home Secretary Amber Rudd said Saturday that 45 public health organizations were hit, but she stressed that no patient data had been stolen.

The attack froze computers at hospitals across the country, with some canceling all routine procedures. Patients were asked not to come to hospitals unless it was an emergency.

British media had reported last year that most public health organizations were using an outdated version of Microsoft Windows that was not equipped with security updates.

Marines weigh in on Helmand experiences

By E.B. BOYD
Stars and Stripes

CAMP SHORAB, Afghanistan — A Marine unit was dispatched to Helmand last month for the first time since 2014. The 300-strong Task Force Southwest is taking over from an Army unit that has been there since the fall. This new team, like its predecessor, is not a combat unit; its purpose is to advise and to provide much-needed instruction and support to the Afghan military.

About half of the new Marines have previous experience serving in Afghanistan or on advising teams. For the veterans, the new mission stands in stark contrast to their previous Afghanistan tours.

Instead of being holed up at cramped patrol bases, they are stationed at the well-appointed Camp Shorab, which sits on land once occupied by the U.K.'s Camp Bastion. Instead of going on patrol and taking fire, they spend their days working alongside their Afghan counterparts, behind the wire. The returning Marines have nine months to make a mark. Since the last Devil Dog pulled out in the fall of 2014, the Taliban have reconquered about half the province, which the Marines liberated at great cost between 2008 and 2012.

Marines with Task Force Southwest will be picking up where the Army's Task Force Forge left off. They'll hope to help the Afghan Army's 215 Corps and the 505th national police zone hold off the Taliban and maybe even start to push them back.

During a transfer of authority ceremony at the end of April, Stars and Stripes spoke with some of the Marines in Helmand. Here are a few we met.

Gunnery Sgt. Ronnie Mills, 37
Barbourville, Ky.

Enlisted: 2003

Prior job: Combat engineer

Previous deployments: 2004-05, Phantom Fury (Second Battle of Fallujah, Iraq); 2006, Fallujah; 2008, Fallujah; 2010-11, Marjah, Afghanistan

Job on Task Force Southwest: Instructor: Route clearance, mine and improvised explosive device detection, cache searches, weapon tactics, squad and platoon-level movements, patrolling.

How this deployment compares to his previous one: This is way better than when we were in Marjah. Last time, I was eating "tray rats" (unit-sized MREs), we were on combat patrols every day, taking contact, IEDs. Now we have a great chow hall, the gym and we're training. We're not knee-deep in mud and opium fields. It's a lot different.

The difference in Camp Leatherneck

today: It's completely different. In 2011 when I was here, I would compare it to being on a Marine Corps base in the States. There were people everywhere. The gyms, chow halls were phenomenal. It was really built up. It's all still there, but it's a ghost town. Pretty much everything is exactly the same except it's a little more weathered, and there are no people there.

Capt. Sean Kaiser, 31
Fresno, Calif.

Commissioned: 2007

Previous job: Company commander, 8th Communications Battalion

Previous deployments: 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Persian Gulf), Black Sea Rotational Force

Job on Task Force Southwest: Adviser to the 215 Corps G-6 (Communications/Signals). We're making sure they understand (how) to enable command and control in the most effective manner for their forces at the brigades and down to the kandak (battalion) level. It's a dual mission of advising them on the best way to do C2 when they're engaged and doing missions: so tactical communications, larger broadband communications, as well as the garrison communications — fiber in their buildings and building up that infrastructure.

How the Afghans are doing: I think the Afghans are doing a whole lot better than people give them credit for. You hear a lot of the bad news, reports that paint a really bad picture. But overall, there are a lot of positive things that are going on. They're making a lot of positive gains. They're trying hard. Their G-6 is way more advanced than I expected. They are probably operating close to what a Western military would be. Their communications out here are great. There's still work to be done on maintenance. There's still lots of little things to work on. But overall, they get the big picture, and they're executing on that.

Advice received from Afghanistan veterans: Make sure you know your (Afghan) counterpart and get close to them. The better you know your counterpart, the better off you're going to be because they know what's going on. Prepare for it as much as you can. Train. Stay on guard. Watch yourself, and watch everyone around you. Stay vigilant.

Lance Cpl. Jessie Key, 22
Bedford, Va.

Enlisted: 2016

Prior job: Assaultman, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines

Previous deployments: This is his first

Job on Task Force Southwest: I'm pulling guard duty, (looking out for) anything that seems like a threat, that's trying to at-

tack the base. My platoon, all we're worried about is making sure there are no threats coming into the base.

Why he enlisted: I felt like God led me here. One day I was at church. It was Veterans Day. They were recognizing all the people who were veterans. I felt led to come.

Advice from Afghanistan veterans: Just that anybody can do anything at any time, so just be on your guard at all times.

Lucky charm: Before I left, this little kid (in church) came up and gave me a necklace, a shield with a Bible quote on the back of it. I didn't know the kid. He just walked up and said he wanted to give me this. His dad had been deployed before and had the same necklace.

Cmdr. Michael Mercado (U.S. Navy), 39
Stockton, Calif.

Commissioned: 2004

Previous deployment: 2008-09, Camp Clark, Khost, Afghanistan, advising the 1st Brigade of the 203rd Corps

Job on Task Force Southwest: Task Force surgeon. I'm in charge of all medical operations. I take care of the folks here. I advise the 215 Corps commander of the hospital as well as the Corps surgeon, who's also a medical operations guy.

Why he joined the military: I didn't know much about the military except that I had about \$150,000 worth of (school) loans. (But) I'm well beyond my obligation. My first deployment really solidified the sense of purpose of being in the military. I would have thought (that) being sent away for a year in a country where it's dangerous and away from my family, I would have said I was done. But it turned it around. I actually re-upped after my deployment.

Why? I felt like I made a difference. We had a local national clinic that we set up when I was there, and (it felt good) to be able to do something special for a place that has nowhere near the resources that we have, and yet we're in the same fight.

How this deployment differs from his last one: I don't know if it's a lot different. It's the same in the sense that it's nice to get out and see that there are other fighters who are out there wanting to defend the freedom of their country, but also on a global scale to prevent terrorism across the world.

Where the Afghan medical teams need help: Communication. Getting them (from point of injury) to the next echelon of care efficiently is something that I'm wanting to focus on. It's not a lot of clinical stuff. It's really getting the right leaders talking to each other — so at the point of injury and then talking back to the Corps, who can talk to the hospital to be able to receive them. Time is of the essence when it's something that needs surgery.

Army shows off its newest ride

Daily Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — The Army's newest ride has a 340-horsepower diesel engine, a six-speed automatic transmission and seats four comfortably.

It comes with killer options, but the real attraction is its flexibility, Army leaders say.

The Joint Light Tactical Vehicle (JLTV) was displayed at Fort Eustis on May 2, attracting a stream of curious on-lookers. That's understandable. Eustis is home to the headquarters of Training and Doctrine Command, which played a role in developing the vehicle that will replace the Humvee.

The vehicle was kept from public view on May 2. Security concerns limited the view for media photography. But the JLTV will soon be everywhere.

The vehicle was transported in from Michigan, home to an Army acquisition organization involved in hundreds of diverse systems, including the JLTV. The group's full name is a mouthful: Program Executive Office Combat Support and Combat Service Support.

"This is an opportunity for senior leaders and those who had a hand in the program to understand where it's come to," said Michael D. Clow, director of communications for that organization.

Simply put, the vehicle is designed to handle multiple missions and maneuver in everything from soft sand to hard asphalt thanks to its adjustable

controls and ability to accommodate different equipment depending on the mission.

The Army eventually wants to purchase about 49,000 of the vehicles, and plans to field it by early 2019, Clow said. The Marine Corps is planning to buy about 5,500.

The Humvee served for decades and spawned a civilian model known as the Hummer. Planning for a replacement began 10 years ago as Army leaders determined they needed a stronger, more flexible vehicle.

As the war grew and evolved in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Humvee was asked to do more, said Col. Shane Fullmer, JLTV joint program manager.

The Army added armor to protect it from explosives, but it sacrificed mobility. Its vulnerability to roadside bombs was a big problem.

"We really couldn't protect it the way we wanted to," Fullmer said. "There's not enough space underneath it to do much."

The military then fielded the MRAP, which stands for Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle. It was stronger but heavier and more difficult to airlift into trouble spots. The military needed something that would protect its soldiers but was light enough to move around via helicopter or cargo plane.

The JLTV strikes that balance, Fullmer said.

It is light enough to be airlifted and squat enough for amphibious transport by Marines.

It also has a higher ground clearance than the Humvee to minimize damage from roadside bombs.

Its suspension and tire pressure are easily adjustable, allowing the JLTV to go from sand to asphalt. It can be outfitted with a gunner's mount to accommodate a variety of weapons. The interior is configured for "plug and play" communications and radio equipment for a variety of missions.

"Our theory in this acquisition," said Fullmer, "was to get a very inexpensive base vehicle. Then you can buy a wide variety of kits to scale it."

The JLTV was designed by Oshkosh Defense, which bested Lockheed Martin and AM General, the Humvee's maker, in a three-year competition that ended in 2015. Oshkosh received a \$6.7 billion contract in 2015 to produce about 17,000 of the light vehicles.

A single JLTV rolls off the production line at about \$253,000, which Fullmer said is an excellent price given the next-generation technology and flexibility built into the platform.

The Army currently has about 100 in hand, Fullmer said, and is testing them at sites throughout the country.

"We think it really restores flexibility to the joint force commander," Fullmer said. "Now we can go places where the Humvee was unable to go."

Competition aims to help solve issues plaguing VA

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs is looking to its employees for new ideas to combat its oldest and biggest challenges, and it will screen potential solutions in a competition similar to the ABC reality show "Shark Tank."

The VA received 356 applications this year from its employees, all with ideas on how to work on VA Secretary David Shulkin's five priorities: offering veterans better health care options, improving efficiency, modernizing the health care system, suicide prevention and streamlining veterans' access to care. On June 13, 20 finalists will present their ideas in Washington to the "sharks," a panel of VA leaders from across the country.

Based on the presentations, VA leaders will offer up grants for the projects. Funding for the top ideas could total \$200,000 or less for each idea implemented throughout the VA.

"There are so many amazing things that happen on the ground level and in the field, so many microinnovations that are happening and stay there as small experiments. Now we can escalate them to the entire system," said Poonam Alaigh, the VA's acting undersecretary for health. "This is another way of bringing lots of momentum to the best ideas and solutions."

In the two previous years of the competition, the review and judging of employees' ideas was done internally. This year, the VA is also seeking input from veterans' organizations. Evaluators from groups were sent 100 proposals from VA employees and will narrow the field to 20.

In 2015, the first year that the competition was held, 263 VA employees submitted proposals. In 2016, there were 435 applications. After both competitions, 13 were deemed "gold standard" and diffused across the VA system. Alaigh said 10 projects would be chosen this year.

Exercises on Guam move ahead

Associated Press

NAVAL BASE GUAM — Multinational amphibious exercises on the U.S. Pacific island of Guam were moving ahead Saturday, one day after being suspended when a French landing craft ran aground.

First Lt. Joshua Hays, a spokesman for the U.S. 3rd Marine Division, said Japanese soldiers were to practice rubber craft raids. On Sunday, U.S. Marines planned to conduct

live-fire training with French troops.

The weeklong maneuvers, which also involve Britain, were intended to show support for the free passage of vessels in international waters amid concerns China may restrict access to the South China Sea.

They're being held around Guam and Tinian islands, U.S. islands that are about 1,500 miles south of Tokyo and east of Manila, Philippines.

The exercises feature two French ships on a four-month deployment to the Indian and Pacific oceans. Some 50 Japanese soldiers and 160 Japanese sailors were due to participate, along with U.K. helicopters and 70 U.K. troops deployed with one of the French ships.

On Friday, the drills came to a halt when a French landing craft ran aground. U.S. officials said they stopped the drills so they could assess the situation.

Trump: FBI head could be picked this week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Saturday that “we can make a fast decision” on a new FBI director, possibly by late next week, before he leaves on his first foreign trip since taking office.

“Even that is possible,” he told reporters when asked whether he could announce his nominee by Friday, when he is scheduled to leave for the Midwest and Europe.

Four candidates to be the bureau’s director were in line Saturday for the first interviews with Attorney General Jeff Sessions and his deputy, Rod Rosenstein, at Justice De-

partment headquarters. They are among nearly a dozen candidates Trump is considering, a group that includes several lawmakers, attorneys and law enforcement officials.

“I think the process is going to go quickly. Almost all of them are very well known,” Trump said while flying to Lynchburg, Va., where he was giving the commencement address at Liberty University. “They’ve been vetted over their lifetime, essentially, but very well known, highly respected, really talented people. And that’s what we want for the FBI.”

The Trump administration is looking to fill the job, which requires Senate confirmation,

after Trump abruptly fired Director James Comey on Tuesday.

The first candidate to arrive was Alice Fisher, a high-ranking Justice Department official in the George W. Bush administration. She left after about an hour and a half inside the building and declined to comment to reporters.

Among those also expected to be coming were acting FBI director Andrew McCabe, Michael J. Garcia, an associate judge on New York’s highest court, and GOP Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, the No. 2 Senate leader and a former state attorney general. That’s according to two people fa-

miliar with the search process who weren’t authorized to publicly discuss the deliberations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Fisher formerly served as assistant attorney general for the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. She faced resistance from Democrats during her confirmation over her alleged participation in discussions about detention policies at the Guantanamo Bay facility in Cuba. She also was deputy special counsel to the Senate special committee that investigated President Bill Clinton’s Whitewater scandal.

The FBI has never had a female director.

Critics claim push for harsh sentences will hurt minorities

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The nation’s federal prosecutors should bring the toughest charges possible against most crime suspects, Attorney General Jeff Sessions instructed in a move that critics assailed as a return to failed drug-war policies that unduly affected minorities and filled prisons with nonviolent offenders.

The move announced Friday is a reversal of Obama-era policies that is sure to send more people to prison and for longer terms.

Advocates warned the shift would crowd federal prisons and strain Justice Department resources. Some involved in criminal justice during the drug war feared the human impact would look similar.

“It ruined families and took away a large number of African-American men from their communities at their prime working years,” said Georgetown law professor Paul Butler, who was a federal prosecutor during the 1990s. “You had people who weren’t able to be responsible fathers for their kids, who weren’t able to serve a couple of years for making a mistake, then come

home and do better. That’s the era Jeff Sessions wants to return us to.”

Sessions contends a spike in violence in big cities and the nation’s opioid epidemic show the need for a return to tougher tactics.

The memo concedes there will be cases in which “good judgment” will warrant a prosecutor veering from that rule. And Sessions said prosecutors maintain “discretion to avoid sentences that would result in an injustice.”

Any exceptions will need to be approved by top supervisors, and the reasons must be documented.

The directive rescinds guidance by Sessions’ Democratic predecessor, Eric Holder, who told prosecutors they could in some cases leave drug quantities out of charging documents so as not to charge suspects with crimes that trigger long sentences.

In a statement Friday, Holder called the reversal “dumb on crime,” saying it would be “financially ruinous” for the department to focus its spending on incarceration rather than preventing and investigating crime.

Trump urges Liberty grads to stand up to criticism

Associated Press

LYNCHBURG, Va. — Delivering his first commencement address, President Donald Trump on Saturday urged graduates of a Christian university to follow their convictions but also to be willing to stand up to criticism from others who don’t have the courage to do what is right.

Trump kept to an upbeat message in his first extended public appearance since firing James Comey as FBI director last week, saying the lawyer and veteran prosecutor was an incompetent “showboat” and “grandstander.”

The timing of Comey’s dismissal raised questions about Trump’s decision, as the FBI continues its investigation into Russia’s role in the 2016 presidential campaign that ended with Trump’s election.

Trump didn’t mention the fallout over Comey’s firing in his remarks to graduates of Liberty University, a Christian school whose leader was one of Trump’s earliest and most outspoken supporters during the campaign.

Drawing parallels to what was widely viewed as a long-

shot bid by Trump for the presidency, he urged the more than 18,000 graduates to fight for what they believe in and to “challenge entrenched interests and failed power structures.” A crowd of more than double that size filled an outdoor stadium on campus to welcome just the second sitting president to address the university’s commencement.

Trump told graduates to “treat the word ‘impossible’ as nothing more than motivation” and to embrace being called an “outsider” because “It’s the outsiders who change the world.”

“The more that a broken system tells you that you’re wrong, the more certain you must be that you must keep pushing ahead,” added Trump, who often complains about having been underestimated during the presidential campaign.

A recent Pew Research Center survey marking Trump’s first 100 days in office, a milestone reached April 29, found three-quarters of white evangelicals approved of his performance as president while just 39 percent of the general public held the same view.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Report of scorpion onboard delays flight

TX HOUSTON — A United flight from Houston to Ecuador was delayed after a scorpion was spotted aboard.

United told KHOU-TV that Flight 1035 returned to the gate Thursday night after a scorpion “reportedly emerged from a customer’s clothing.” Paramedics examined the man and determined that he hadn’t been stung. The station said it’s unclear whether a scorpion was found.

United says it found a new aircraft for the flight and all passengers were given a meal voucher for the inconvenience.

The flight eventually got underway 3.5 hours late.

Group hopes painted rocks spread cheer

AK KENAI — Bright stones lead to bright smiles. At least that’s what Kenai Rocks is hoping for.

The Peninsula Clarion reported the new group in Kenai wants to spread joy and fun by randomly hiding painted rocks throughout the community.

Emily Kaiser, who started the group with her sister, Sarah Kaiser, says the group’s mission is to bring about unexpected smiles and spark creativity in the area.

The rocks are hand painted by community members and then are weatherproofed.

The group asks those who find a hidden rock to post a photo in their Facebook group.

Officials finalize sale of state prison

PA CRESSON — Officials have finalized the sale of a state prison in central Pennsylvania.

The (Johnstown) Tribune-Democrat reported that 328 acres of the former State Correctional Institute at Cresson was sold to businessman Carl Weaver. A spokesman for the Department of General Services says the property sold for \$600,000.

Ninety-three acres of the prison property were transferred to the Cambria County Redevelopment Authority last year. The county agency’s executive director, Larry Custer, said developers will be more interested in the property now because the state isn’t involved anymore. Custer added that the site is served by public water and sewer lines.

Day hiker who got lost survives nearly a week

MT WEST GLACIER — A woman who spent a week lost in a Montana wilderness area with her dog thanked her rescuers Wednesday and said she and her parents planned to go out for Mexican food.

Madeline Connelly, 23, and her dog, Mogi, planned a day hike in the Great Bear Wilderness on May 4. Connelly said she realized they didn’t have any water and stopped at a swimming hole. When they got back up they took a wrong turn, she told KTMF-TV on Wednesday.

Family members contacted authorities on May 6. After an extensive search, Connelly was found Wednesday morning in what Flathead County Sheriff Chuck Curry called a heavily wooded area.

Her rescuers estimated she hiked about 10 miles each day. She said she and her dog rested for two days and slept under trees. They had no food or shelter and no idea of the rescue efforts.

Not the hotel valet: Man takes minivan

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — Authorities say a man stole a minivan at an Atlantic City hotel when the driver mistook him for a valet.

Atlantic City police said city resident Steven Jacobs, 35, was arrested around 7 a.m. Sunday after officers stopped the vehicle. They said a loaded handgun was found on the floorboard.

Authorities said the car had been taken Saturday at the Wyndham Skyline Tower, shortly after the minivan’s owner arrived at the site and voluntarily gave Jacobs his keys.

Jacobs is charged with theft of movable property and a weapons offense.

Man loses fingers to homemade fireworks

PA SCRANTON — A Pennsylvania man has lost some fingers and his freedom by making homemade fireworks, one of which exploded.

Federal agents are still investigating Monday’s blast at the Scranton home of Raymond Jones, 58. For now, he faces state court charges of possessing explosives and risking a catastrophe, though federal charges could also be filed.

Scranton police said Jones made several Frisbee-shaped bombs and lost several fingers when one exploded.

Police said Jones at first was concerned police would mistake him for a terrorist and claimed he hurt his hand fixing a friend’s vehicle. But he later acknowledged making the fireworks for his own amusement before one blew up prematurely.

Mayor charged with corruption hosts cruise

NJ PATERSON — A New Jersey mayor facing corruption charges hosted a cruise to raise money for his legal fees.

NorthJersey.com reported that Paterson Mayor Joey Torres charged \$150 to \$250 per person for a Hudson River harbor cruise Thursday evening.

Torres said about 300 people attended the event. He did not say how much money was raised.

Torres and three city public works officials are charged with conspiring to have city employees work overtime at a warehouse leased by the mayor’s family. He has pleaded not guilty.

The mayor said he plans to hold another legal defense fundraiser in July and plans to run for re-election next year.

27 turtles rescued from poaching attempt

NY NEW YORK — More than two dozen turtles were rescued after a group of women attempted to remove them from a lake in a New York City park.

A passer-by stopped the group from removing the turtles from Prospect Park Lake in Brooklyn and called the police. The women removed and bagged a total of 27 turtles before they were stopped.

WCBS-TV reported police had detained one woman, who was issued a summons for the incident on May 4.

The city’s Department of Parks and Recreation says it is illegal to remove or harm animals in city parks.

From wire reports

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and Military News

Wall's three forces Game 7 with Celtics

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — John Wall stood atop the scorer's table, popping his jersey, yelling and celebrating his three-pointer with 3.5 seconds left for the go-ahead basket that put his Washington Wizards into a Game 7 against the Boston Celtics.

After Washington's 92-91 victory extended the Eastern Conference semifinal, Wall offered his thoughts on Boston's failure to back up its fashion statement of wearing all black clothing to the arena Friday night.

"It was just funny to me. It was kind of copy-catting what we did," said Wall, whose Wizards donned dark outfits before a regular-season game between these teams that are building a rivalry. "It was in my mind throughout the game that I didn't want them to come here, wear all black, and basically call it a funeral."

Thanks to him and backcourt mate Bradley Beal, Washington's season will last at least one more game. Wall finished with 26 points, Beal scored a

game-high 33, and they combined for 23 of Washington's 26 points in the back-and-forth fourth quarter.

"All we asked for was one more game," Wall said, "and we got it."

Game 7 is at Boston on Monday night. The winner will face LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers in the East finals starting Wednesday.

The host has won all 10 games between the Wizards and Celtics this season — four in the regular season and six in the playoffs.

"Two best words in playoffs is 'Game 7,'" Wizards coach Scott Brooks said. "Seems like it was meant to be."

Isaiah Thomas and Avery Bradley each scored 27 points for Boston, the conference's No. 1 seed.

But Bradley could do nothing defensively to stop Wall on the winning shot, coming off an inbound play that was designed to get Beal the ball. And Thomas' heave at the buzzer clanked off the rim.

"I thought it was going in," Thomas said. "Honestly I did."

Like the rest of his teammates, he was left to get back into his dark outfit afterward. Wearing a black shirt, he scoffed at the idea Wall and the Wizards derived some boost from knowing about the Celtics' choice of attire.

"Their season was on the line," he said. "They should have been motivated by everything else."

Boston, which won Game 5 at home by 22 points, led this game 69-66 entering the fourth quarter, when a relatively blah game became much more compelling. The final period was tight throughout, featuring six ties and nine lead changes.

Boston was up 87-82, but did not hold on.

"We put ourselves in position to win the game," said Al Horford, whose 16-foot baseline bank shot with 7.7 seconds left gave Boston its last lead at 91-89. "Couldn't finish it. ... We can't dwell on this."

Wall and Beal both shook off

slow starts.

Beal was 0-for-7 on threes before making his only one of the game with 69 seconds left. The Wizards as a whole started 1-for-15 from beyond the arc. And Wall started 1-for-12 overall before closing by making 8 of 13.

"If I go 1-for-30," he shrugged, "that's the way I go out."

Not since 1979 have the Wizards reached the conference finals, and Wall has made clear he'll consider this season — Brooks' first as the team's coach — a waste of time if they don't get there this time.

"We don't win Game 7," Wall said, "we feel like it was a failure."

Some Celtics said it was purely coincidence that they showed up wearing black, the way the Wizards did for what became known as the "Funeral Game," won by Washington in January.

Joked Brooks: "I'm going to talk to my lawyers. I think we have that trademarked, right? That's our thing."

Neal's OT goal lifts Predators over Ducks in Game 1

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — A few moments after James Neal crumpled Anaheim's Brandon Montour with a vicious check, the Nashville forward took a pass from P.K. Subban and ripped a shot past three Ducks for the winning overtime goal.

Even in uncharted territory for this franchise, the Predators are still rolling through the Stanley Cup playoffs with their distinct combination of smash and flash.

Neal scored 9:24 into OT, Pekka Rinne made 27 saves and the Predators kicked off their first appearance in the NHL Western Conference finals with a 3-2 victory over the Anaheim Ducks on Friday night.

Filip Forsberg and Austin Watson scored in regulation for the Predators, who improved to 9-2 in this NHL postsea-

son. They also won their third straight series opener on the road, continuing their month-long run of relentless postseason play.

"It shows a lot of character," Rinne said. "All night, we had a lot of chances and we didn't give them a lot. ... I thought that we created a lot, and eventually we were going to get one by him. I thought (Ducks goalie John) Gibson played a strong game tonight, but guys stuck with it. We've been doing that the whole playoffs. It's a great sign for a team."

Game 2 is Sunday night.

After finishing off St. Louis in the second round last weekend and resting while the Ducks labored through seven games against Edmonton, Nashville capitalized on its fresh legs to win a predictably physical game between two hard-hitting powers.

Nashville got off to a strong start and followed it up with a gritty overtime effort after Hampus Lindholm's first playoff goal in two years tied it for the Ducks in the third period.

Neal put a long shot past a sprawled Gibson after a prolonged threat by the Predators that left Anaheim's defense in disarray. The goal was the veteran forward's third in four games.

"I don't know if it hit the goalie or the player that was laying in front still," Neal said. "But it was a good feeling to see it go in."

Jakob Silfverberg scored on the Ducks' first shot, and Gibson stopped 43 shots in a stellar performance. Just two days after finishing off the Oilers in the second round, Anaheim struggled to keep up at times in its second conference finals appearance in three years.

"No guy will use that as an excuse," said center Nate Thompson, who won the faceoff that led to Lindholm's tying goal. "They came out and took it to us. We just need to get back to playing our game."

Although this conference final matches two Sun Belt clubs 2,000 miles apart, they have a feisty history. Anaheim and Nashville are meeting in the postseason for the third time, including the past two seasons.

Nashville twice won Game 1 and went on to claim the previous two series with major help from Rinne, who usually has been at his inimitable best when facing the Ducks' scorers. Rinne picked up right where he left off last season when Nashville eliminated Anaheim from the first round in seven games, but Gibson was similarly outstanding.

Oosthuizen, Stanley share Players lead

Associated Press

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — Each birdie by Louis Oosthuizen and Kyle Stanley pushed them higher up the leaderboard, a little further away from those chasing them in The Players Championship.

And as Friday showed, every little bit helps.

Anirban Lahiri looked like a lock to at least make the cut until he hit three shots into the water on the 18th and took a 10. Jim Furyk celebrated his 47th birthday with a solid round that came undone with two shots into the water on the island-green 17th that caused him to take the weekend off.

J.B. Holmes was tied for the lead until bogeys on his last two holes.

Vijay Singh, the 54-year-old surprise of the tournament, poured in putts from everywhere until a three-putt on the 18th gave him a 68 and put him three behind.

"I don't think you can every get too comfortable out here," Stanley said after an eight-birdie round of 6-under 66,

matching Oosthuizen for the best score of the second round and giving them a share of the lead at 9-under 135.

As conditions toughened at TPC Sawgrass, they played even better.

Dustin Johnson and Rory McIlroy scrapped it around Friday morning, Johnson making only one birdie for a 73 and McIlroy managing through nagging back pain for a 71. They were at even par and not too bothered. They were only five behind when they finished, and they could sense that because of steamy weather and swaying pines that nobody was going to get too far away from him.

"I'm going to have to play two really good rounds on the weekend," Johnson said.

Johnson and McIlroy at least are still in the game.

Jordan Spieth was headed home after missing the cut for the third straight year, yet he didn't sound terribly upset. He chalked that up to not being able to handle this strand of grass when it gets firm and

crusty. Spieth's last hope ended with a tee shot that bounced at the back of the island-green 17th and into the water.

The cut was at 2-over 146, and there will be another cut Saturday because more than 78 players advanced to the weekend. That's when the tournament will finally start to take shape, and while Oosthuizen and Stanley stood out with the best scores of the second round, both know it can change quickly.

"We're in a pretty good spot going into this weekend," said Oosthuizen, the 2010 British Open champion who still hasn't won in America. "A lot of golf to be played around this golf course, and as we've seen the last two days, you can easily make a mistake around this track."

Yes, there were plenty of those.

Along with Lahiri, the other big number belonged to Zac Blair. He hit three shots into the water on the par-3 17th and made a 9.

Phil Mickelson started mak-

ing putts and moved up the leaderboard, only to begin a slow slide. He made three bogeys on the back nine and then, torn between a 9-iron and a wedge on the 17th, he opted for a wedge to make sure it didn't go over the back of the island. It still hopped hard at the back of the green and went into the water, leading to a double bogey.

That left him at 72, seven shots behind.

"It's a hard course, and any errant swings will lead to not a good score," Mickelson said. "But I played a good front nine and shot even. I don't know what else to say."

Defending champion Jason Day didn't make up any ground, either, trading birdies and bogeys for a 72. He also was seven back at 2-under 142. Rickie Fowler shot 74 and joined Johnson and McIlroy at 144.

Ian Poulter, who only got into The Players on a clerical mistake regarding his time away for injury, shot 67 and was in the large group at 5-under 139.

WNBA begins 21st season with changes around league

Associated Press

NEW YORK — It's been seven months since the WNBA Finals ended in thrilling fashion with the Los Angeles Sparks edging the Minnesota Lynx in a decisive fifth game.

The league began its 21st season Saturday when San Antonio visited New York in the opener of a three-game slate.

The Sparks also played Saturday, but without Finals MVP Candace Parker, Jantel Lavender and Essence Carson. The trio is still playing overseas in the Turkish League final. That caused the team to move its ring ceremony back a week so that they could all take part in it.

Los Angeles didn't stand pat in the offseason, trading for Odyssey Sims after the team lost guard Kristi Toliver to free agency. It was quite the active

winter for the league. There were a flurry of other deals, including the blockbuster that sent former MVP Elena Delle Donne to the Washington Mystics. She'll make her debut on Sunday when the Mystics face the Stars.

There was also the retirement of longtime stars Tamika Catchings, Penny Taylor and Swin Cash.

Here are a few key story lines for the upcoming season:

Title defense: No team has won consecutive titles in the WNBA since Los Angeles did it in 2001-02. Sparks coach Brian Agler knows firsthand how difficult it is to repeat as champion, trying to do it in Seattle a few years ago.

"I don't like the approach of defending," he said. "This season our roster's completely different, our schedule's different,

our competition's different. You just try to stay in the moment, get better each day, get ready for your next opponent."

Agler won't have his entire team together until probably the end of May.

Hungry Lynx: Minnesota came within 4 seconds of winning its fourth title in six seasons. Instead, the Lynx were left wondering what happened. The team's core of Maya Moore, Lindsay Whalen, Sylvia Fowles and Seimone Augustus are back, albeit a year older. Moore, Whalen and Augustus didn't play this winter overseas, giving their bodies a chance to rest.

"They have the hunger and they have the passion," Minnesota coach Cheryl Reeve said. "That's a really, really dangerous set of ingredients to have all that, and to have that

fire still burn so bright inside of them. That's what makes our group special."

Sitting out: The Atlanta Dream will be missing All-Star Angel McCoughtry as she's decided to sit out this season to rest her body. The Dream will need Tiffany Hayes, Elizabeth Williams and Layshia Clarendon to pick up the slack on offense. McCoughtry isn't the only one missing this year. The Mercury will be without DeWanna Bonner, who is pregnant. New York guard Shoni Schimmel is missing the year to deal with personal issues.

Record breaker: Diana Taurasi is just 178 points short of breaking Tina Thompson's all-time scoring record. With only Brittney Griner back from last year's team, Taurasi might need to score a lot to keep the Phoenix Mercury competitive.

Contreras' homers lift Cubs over Cards

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The Chicago Cubs were looking for a catalyst to get them back on track and found what they needed in their battery.

Catcher Willson Contreras connected twice for his first career multihomer game, Eddie Butler threw six scoreless innings in his season debut and the Cubs beat St. Louis 3-2 Friday, ending the Cardinals' six-game winning streak.

The Cubs won for just the second time in seven games.

"It feels good coming in here and helping the guys win," Butler said. "Me and Willy had a big game plan going into it and we followed it pretty well. I ended up getting the guys a

couple zeros there and they put up some runs."

Chicago played without NL MVP Kris Bryant, who was scratched from the lineup with a stomach virus. He's already been ruled out for Saturday's game.

Butler (1-0), who pitched the last three seasons with Colorado and was traded to the Cubs before spring training, gave up two hits. He struck out five and walked three.

Butler started in place of the injured Brett Anderson. The only two hits he allowed were infield singles by Aledmys Diaz, including a bunt.

"Eddie was really good, wasn't he?" Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "He was really

good. Probably walked more than what you see out of him but had really good stuff. I thought he was very, very good and it set the whole game up for us, actually."

Wade Davis got his eighth save in as many tries.

Contreras homered twice off Mike Leake (4-2), who entered with the National League's best ERA and had only given up one home run in six starts.

"We just didn't barrel the ball up enough and we couldn't find enough holes," Leake said. "Games like that are going to happen."

Contreras, who had 12 home runs in 2016, hit solo homers in the second and fourth innings. He has four this year, three in

St. Louis.

Tommy La Stella also homered for the Cubs. Once Bryant was scratched, Jon Jay got into the lineup, but he exited in the second inning with back spasms and La Stella entered.

Randal Grichuk homered in the St. Louis seventh off Carl Edwards Jr. The Cardinals had two runners on later in the inning, but Dexter Fowler got picked off at first on a snap throw by Contreras to end the threat.

For all of his offensive fireworks, it was his defense that Contreras was more pleased with after the game.

"(The offense) means a lot," he said. "But the pick off at first was bigger."

Astros grab top record in majors by beating Yankees

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mac & Mac made it another successful night for the streaking Houston Astros.

Brian McCann hit a three-run homer against his former team and Lance McCullers Jr. pitched four-hit ball over six shutout innings to lead Houston past the New York Yankees 5-1 on Friday for its fifth straight victory.

Carlos Correa added a pop-fly RBI single for the Astros, who boosted the top record in the majors to 25-11. Off to the best start in team history, Houston has won 10 of 12 and matched its longest winning streak of the season.

"We know what we're capable of," said McCullers, the pitcher-of-the-game belt slung over his left shoulder. "We can do some pretty cool things if everyone does their job."

Suddenly slumping at the plate, the Yankees barely avoided being shut out for the first time this year when Didi Gregorius hit a run-scoring single off James Hoyt with two outs in the ninth. New York (21-12) has dropped three in a row for the first time since the opening

week of the season.

Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman gave up Josh Reddick's two-out RBI single in the ninth and was checked by a trainer on the mound moments later. Chapman initially remained in the game, then was removed after allowing another single.

"He said he was fine. Nothing. No pain," manager Joe Girardi said.

It was Chapman's first outing since blowing a three-run lead in the ninth inning Sunday against the Chicago Cubs. The left-hander has thrown 60 pitches over his last 11/3 innings.

"I could have left him out there, but I didn't want him to throw too many pitches. I thought that would be silly," Girardi said.

Rookie left-hander Jordan Montgomery (2-2) gave up four runs and eight hits in six innings, the first time he's permitted more than three runs in six major league starts.

The 23-year-old McCullers (3-1) struck out seven and walked none.

Giants 3, Reds 2 (17): Buster Posey homered with one out in the 17th inning and host San Francisco beat Cincinnati for

the first time this season.

Twins 1, Indians 0: Ervin Santana (6-1) allowed two hits and five walks in seven innings, Miguel Sano homered in the first off Josh Tomlin and Minnesota handed host Cleveland its first shutout of the season.

Blue Jays 4, Mariners 0: Joe Biagini (1-1) gave up four hits in five innings, combining with four relievers on a seven-hitter to lead host Toronto past Seattle.

Braves 8, Marlins 4: Tyler Flowers homered and drove in four runs as visiting Atlanta stopped a six-game losing streak by beating Miami.

Rays 5, Red Sox 4: Alex Cobb (3-3) took a one-hit shutout into the seventh before tiring and giving up four runs — three earned — and three hits in 6 1/3 innings during visiting Tampa Bay's win over Boston.

Royals 3, Orioles 2: Eric Hosmer delivered another key hit, doubling home the go-ahead run in the eighth inning to lead host Kansas City past Baltimore.

Rangers 5, Athletics 2: Joey Gallo hit a game-ending three-run homer as host Texas won with a four-run ninth inning for

the second night in a row, this time beating Oakland.

Brewers 7, Mets 4: Host Milwaukee's Eric Sogard and Orlando Arcia hit back-to-back homers in the sixth off Matt Harvey (2-3), spoiling the choppy return of New York's starter from a three-game suspension.

Padres 6, White Sox 3: Austin Hedges homered and drove in three runs with two out, and visiting San Diego handed Chicago its sixth straight loss.

Dodgers 6, Rockies 2: Clayton Kershaw (6-2) pitched his way out of trouble time after time over seven solid innings, Chase Utley had a two-run triple as part of a five-run second and visiting Los Angeles beat NL West-leading Colorado.

Diamondbacks 11, Pirates 4: Chris Iannetta homered early, and later was bloodied by a fastball to the face as host Arizona beat Pittsburgh in the latest episode of ill will between the teams.

Angels 7, Tigers 0: Matt Shoemaker (2-2) allowed three hits in six innings during his best start of the season, Mike Trout and Luis Valbuena homered, and host Los Angeles beat Detroit.