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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Marine ex-instructor cleared in hazing case

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A former Parris Island drill instructor was acquitted Wednesday of hazing-related charges filed against him following an investigation into allegations of widespread mistreatment of recruits at the Marine Corps' storied South Carolina recruit depot, a Marine spokesman said.

A jury of enlisted Marines and officers found Sgt. Riley R. Gress not guilty of charges of cruelty and maltreatment, failure to obey orders and making false statements following a three-day, misdemeanor-level special court-martial, said Marine Capt. Joshua Pena, a spokesman for Marine Training and Education Command. The trial was held at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.

Gress faced up to one year in prison and a bad behavior discharge if convicted. He was one of 15 Parris Island drill instructors removed from duty last year as the Marine Corps investigated allegations of hazing and abuse of recruits raised after a 20-year-old Muslim recruit fell to his

death. That recruit, Raheel Siddiqui, died March 18, 2016, 11 days after arriving at Parris Island, after he fell 40 feet down a barracks stairwell. Siddiqui's death was ruled a suicide, but a Marine Corps investigation found he was mistreated by drill instructors before he died.

Gress' charges were not directly related to Siddiqui's death, according to a Marine Corps statement in December.

He was the first Marine tried on charges related to the hazing scandal and was the most junior-ranked drill instructor charged with a crime. The Marine Corps has not determined what Gress' next assignment will be, Pena said.

At least five other former Parris Island drill instructors face courts-martial later this year.

Charges against four of those Marines are not related to Siddiqui's death, according to the Marine Corps.

One, Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Felix, faces at least some charges linked to the recruit's death. According to a Marine Corps investigation report, Felix slapped Siddiqui moments before he ran into the stairway and jumped. Felix is also accused of calling an-

other Muslim recruit "a terrorist" in 2015 and forcing him into a clothing dryer and running it with the recruit inside.

Felix is expected to face charges of cruelty and maltreatment, drunk and disorderly conduct, failure to obey a lawful order, false official statements and obstruction of justice in a felony-level general court-martial in August at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

Staff Sgt. Michael Eldridge also faces a general court-martial in September at Camp Lejeune connected to forcing the Muslim recruit into a dryer. He is accused of cruelty and maltreatment, drunk and disorderly conduct, making a false official statement and failure to obey orders.

His charges are not related to Siddiqui's death, according to the Marine Corps.

The other former drill instructors charged are not implicated in either Siddiqui's death or the dryer incident.

Staff Sgt. Antonio Burke faces a general court-martial in July on charges including cruelty and maltreatment, failure to obey an order and making a false official statement. Staff Sgts. Matthew T. Bacchus and Jose Lucena-Martinez face special courts-martial this summer on related charges.

Trump's 2018 Navy budget seeks more Tomahawks

BY DIANNA CAHN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — If the Navy gets what President Donald Trump's budget requested, one item on its 2018 shopping list will be 100 Tomahawk cruise missiles, including 66 to replenish those fired in the last year at targets in Syria and Yemen, according to the service.

The missiles that were expended cost about \$1 million each, according to recent estimates. But the price tag to replace them with newer versions is starkly higher — at \$1.91 million per missile, Navy budget procurement documents revealed.

The budget proposal calls for 66 of those missiles to be fund-

ed through the Overseas Contingency Operations account, also known as the war fund, "to replace those expended in the Red Sea and Syria," said Rear Adm. Brian Luther, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget. The other 34 will come out of the baseline budget, he said.

Fiscal year 2017, which ends Sept. 30, has proven to be a busy one for Tomahawk missiles. In October, while in the Red Sea, the destroyer USS Nitze launched several Tomahawks at three coastal radar sites under control of Houthi rebels in Yemen in response to a cruise missile attack on Navy ships operating near the coast. The budget documents reveal

five Tomahawks were fired.

In April, two destroyers in the Mediterranean, the USS Ross and the USS Porter, fired Tomahawks at a Syrian airfield in response to a chemical weapons attack on civilians by the Syrian government. At the time, officials said 60 of the cruise missiles had been fired but one had landed in the water shortly after launch. The 2018 budget document states 61 missiles were expended.

That was the first time the U.S. military has used Tomahawks since 2014, when they were deployed against Islamic State militants.

The Tomahawks, though costly, enable attacks at a distance of up to 1,000 miles from

a target site without endangering pilots.

According to the budget documents, 34 Tomahawk missiles will be funded from the baseline budget at a cost of about \$90.65 million. The Navy proposal also calls for spending about \$43.73 million for the initial procurement of modernization kits that will go toward planned maintenance and recertification of Tomahawk missiles starting in 2019.

The 66 missiles coming out of the war fund are budgeted at about \$100.09 million. In total, the 100 missiles cost about \$190.73 million. The Navy purchased 196 missiles in 2017 at a cost of about \$271.01 million — or \$1.39 million per missile.

Iraqis: Pay victims of Mosul strike

Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi officials demanded compensation from the U.S.-led coalition following an investigation into a March 17 airstrike in which the Pentagon acknowledged a U.S. bomb targeting Islamic State fighters in Mosul set off a series of explosions that killed more than 100 civilians.

However, several residents of the Mosul neighborhood told The Associated Press Friday there were no ISIS fighters or explosives in the house struck by the U.S. bomb.

"We call upon the international community and especially the United States to compensate the victims," said Nuraddin Qablan, the deputy president of the Nineveh provincial council.

The Pentagon released the findings Thursday, reporting the March 17 airstrike targeted two ISIS snipers in a single building, setting off a series of explosions that killed 105 civilians. The Pentagon report added that another 36 civilians may have been at the building at the time.

Civil protection rescue teams reported recovering more than 200 bodies from the area in the days following the March 17 strike. A number of other houses in the area also were destroyed by clashes between ISIS fighters and U.S.-backed Iraqi forces about the same time, according to residents interviewed by The AP, but the Pentagon investigation looked into the single March 17 airstrike that hit at 8:24 a.m.

Residents of the al-Jadida neighborhood, interviewed by the AP on Friday, countered the Pentagon conclusions that there were two ISIS snipers in the house struck by the bomb and that secondary explosions caused by explosives packed into the house by the extremists were largely responsible for the high civilian death toll.

Pence: Trump troops' 'best friend'

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Vice President Mike Pence said Friday "the era of budget cuts of the armed forces of the United States is over," assuring incoming Navy and Marine Corps officers that President Donald Trump will be the "best friend the armed forces of the United States will ever have."

Pence, speaking to cheering graduates at the U.S. Naval Academy, said their commander in chief is committed to providing the resources they need "to lead and fight and win any contest, any struggle, anywhere on behalf of freedom."

"Let me be clear, the era of budget cuts of the armed forces of the United States is over," Pence declared.

The vice president found an appreciative audience in the 1,053 academy graduates, who repeatedly applauded his comments about strengthening the military.

"No matter where you're called to serve, no matter what the mission, this commander in chief will always have your back," Pence said.

Pence, whose son, Michael, is an officer in the Marines, spoke to the graduates' parents in the bleachers of Navy-Marine Corps Stadium, as well as the graduates.

"And to the families who are gathered here today and all these rising officers, I say President Donald Trump and I will not rest, we will not relent until we rebuild our military, restore the arsenal of democracy and ensure that our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast

Guard have all the resources that you need to accomplish your mission and come home safe," Pence said.

Pence highlighted Trump's budget proposal, which he said provided for thousands of new servicemembers and eight new battle force ships headed for the sea.

"Earlier this month, President Trump signed a \$21 billion increase in funding for our armed forces, the largest investment in military readiness in nearly a decade," Pence said. "And earlier this week, in his very first budget, your commander in chief laid out one of the largest increases in defense spending since the days of President Ronald Reagan."

Pence said while the nation must always work for peace, the best way to avoid conflict is to make adversaries aware the U.S. is prepared to win any struggle.

"President Trump is working with the Congress to make the strongest fighting force in history stronger still, and with renewed American strength your commander in chief is once again reaffirming America's role as leader of the free world," Pence said.

Of the 1,053 graduates, 811 are men and 242 are women. The academy said 769 will be commissioned as Navy ensigns, and 259 will be commissioned as 2nd lieutenants in the Marines.

"And as you prepare to assume your duties, I want to say to new officers and to your families, President Donald Trump is the best friend the armed forces of the United States will ever have," Pence said.

US: 3 ISIS leaders killed in Syria, Iraq

Staff and wire reports

The U.S.-led coalition fighting Islamic State reported Friday that recent airstrikes had killed three of the group's leaders, as the U.N. human rights chief complained more and more civilians are paying the price in the air campaign.

U.S. Central Command said coalition airstrikes killed three senior ISIS military planners in Syria and Iraq in the past 30 days.

"The deaths of these men eliminates senior foreign fighters, who had extensive experience and training, and degrades ISIS's ability to plan and conduct attacks on civilian targets in Iraq and Syria, as well throughout the region and in the West," a military statement said.

Late last month, an airstrike near Mayadeen, Syria, killed Mustafa Gunes. He was an ISIS recruiter in Turkey and was facilitating financial support for attacks outside Syria and Iraq in the West. Another coalition strike in Mayadeen earlier this month killed French-Algerian ISIS fighter Abu Asim al-Jazaeri, who was involved in an ISIS training program for youths, the coalition said.

tion said.

And in Iraq last week, senior ISIS official Abu-Khattab al-Rawi was killed along with three other terrorists during an operation near Al-Qaim. Al-Rawi operated in Iraq's Al Anbar province, coordinating drone operations and procurement.

The comments by the U.N. human rights chief, Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini, came hours after airstrikes on the ISIS-held Syrian town of Mayadeen killed dozens on Thursday night. Many of the dead were family members of ISIS fighters.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the airstrikes were conducted by the coalition. It added the airstrikes began about sunset Thursday as people were heading to mosques for evening prayers and continued until the early hours of Friday.

"The same civilians who are suffering indiscriminate shelling and summary executions by [ISIS], are also falling victim to the escalating airstrikes, particularly in the northeastern governorates of" Raqqa and Deir el-Zour, al-Husseini said in a statement from Geneva.

Talks on climate, terrorism on tap at G-7

Associated Press

TAORMINA, Sicily — The differences are well-known: climate change, trade and migration threaten to throw a summit of the Group of Seven wealthy democracies off its consensus game, with President Donald Trump cast as the spoiler-in-chief. But it may not play out exactly that way, according to longtime G-7 observers.

“It is a forum made for Donald Trump’s particular style. It is highly informal, highly interactive and they speak in very colloquial language to each other,” said John Kirton, director of the G-7 Research Group at the University of Toronto.

“It is the ultimate lonely hearts club. No one understands how tough it is to have the top job except the peers with the top job in other countries.”

While Trump has met all of the leaders one on one, this will be the first time all seven are around the same table, including newcomers Emmanuel Macron of France,

Theresa May of Britain and the Italian host, Paolo Gentiloni — forging a new dynamic after a year of global political turmoil amid rising nationalism.

Climate policy promises to be the real buzzkill at the G-7 party. Endorsing measures to combat terror is expected to find easy agreement, especially after the attack on an English pop music concert killed 22 people Monday night.

But some of the trust that fuels such meetings was undermined by a leak of British intelligence in the Manchester attack blamed on a U.S. official, annoying British officials. Trump also going against the grain on trade with more protectionist stand.

His pending review of U.S. climate policies and decision not to make up his mind before Taormina has braced environmentalists for the possibility of bland language that says little after years of increasingly stronger commitments to reduce reliance

on fossil fuels and emissions of in greenhouse gases under the Paris Agreement.

Trump’s attempts to impose a U.S. travel ban on some Muslim countries contrast with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s position that immigration is a source of strong, sustainable inclusive growth. Sicily is on the front lines in Europe’s migration crisis, the first landfall for most of the more than 180,000 migrants who arrived in Italy last year — and the reason the Italian government chose Sicily as the backdrop for this summit.

Kirton said Trump has demonstrated the ability to come to bilateral agreements, and it is possible that Taormina will yield deals for which he can claim credit at home. But his volatile style could upend even summit decisions.

“It is always possible the president will change his mind even before he lands in Washington and fire off some more tweets,” Kirton said.

Mont. Republican wins House race

Associated Press

BOZEMAN, Mont. — A Montana Republican businessman won the state’s U.S. House seat after being charged with assaulting a reporter on the eve of the election, a victory that may temper Democrats’ hopes for a massive anti-Trump wave next year.

Greg Gianforte apologized late Thursday for attacking a reporter who had asked about the GOP health care bill.

“Last night, I made a mistake. I took an action I can’t take back and I am not proud of what happened,” he said.

Yet Gianforte’s single-digit win paled in comparison to President Donald Trump’s 20-point romp in Montana in November, a sign Republicans will have to work to maintain control of Congress.

The race ultimately turned on the weaknesses of both Gianforte and his opponent, folk singer and Democrat Rob Quist, making it tough to use as a barometer for the nation’s political mood.

Gianforte was cited for misdemeanor assault Wednesday night after, according to witnesses, he slammed to the ground a reporter who was asking him questions about the Republican health care bill. Gianforte could be heard on an audio tape yelling at the reporter, Ben Jacobs, of The Guardian.

By the time sheriff’s deputies arrived, more than half of voters had already cast their ballots in the race due to the state’s mail-in voting law.

Appeals court rules against Trump’s revised travel ban

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s revised travel ban “speaks with vague words of national security, but in context drips with religious intolerance, animus and discrimination,” a federal appeals court said Thursday in a ruling against the executive order targeting six Muslim-majority countries.

Trump’s administration vowed to take the fight to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In a 10-3 vote, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the ban likely violates the Constitution. And it upheld a lower-court ruling that blocks the Republican administration from cutting off visas for people from Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

The Richmond, Va.-based 4th Circuit is the first appeals court to rule on the revised travel ban unveiled in March. Trump’s administration had hoped it would avoid the legal problems the first version from January encountered. A second appeals court, the 9th U.S. Circuit based in San Francisco, is also weighing the revised travel ban after a federal judge in Hawaii blocked it.

The Supreme Court almost certainly would step into the case if asked.

Trump could try to persuade the Supreme Court to allow the policy to take effect, even while the justices weigh whether to hear the case. If the administration does ask the

court to step in, the justices’ first vote could signal the court’s ultimate decision.

Chief Judge Roger L. Gregory wrote that the government’s “asserted national security interest ... appears to be a post hoc, secondary justification for an executive action rooted in religious animus and intended to bar Muslims from this country.”

The three dissenting judges, all appointed by Republican presidents, said the majority was wrong to look beyond the text of the order. Calling the executive order a “modest action,” Judge Paul V. Niemeyer wrote that precedent required the court to consider the order “on its face.” Looked at that way, the executive order “is entirely without constitutional fault,” he wrote.

Ilya Somin, a law professor at George Mason University, said if the Supreme Court follows a partisan divide, the Trump administration may fare better since five of the nine are Republican nominees. Still, he said, it’s difficult to make a confident prediction because “Supreme Court justices don’t always vote in ideological lockstep.”

The first travel ban issued Jan. 27 was aimed at seven countries and triggered chaos and protests across the country as travelers were stopped from boarding international flights and detained at airports for hours. Trump tweaked the order after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals refused to reinstate the ban.

Dozens killed in attack on convoy of Christians in Egypt

Associated Press

CAIRO — Masked militants riding in three SUVs opened fire Friday on a bus packed with Coptic Christians south of the Egyptian capital, killing at least 28 people and wounding 22, the Interior Ministry said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, the fourth to target Christians since December, but it bore the hallmarks of Islamic State. The attack came on the eve of the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

For years, Islamic militants have been waging an insurgency mostly centered in the northern part of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, although a growing number of attacks recently have also taken place on the mainland.

The assault happened while the bus was traveling on a side road in the desert leading to the remote monastery of Saint

Samuel the Confessor in Maghagha, in Minya governorate, about 140 miles south of Cairo, where Christians account for more than 35 percent of the population, the highest ratio in any province.

Security officials quoted witnesses as saying they saw between eight and 10 attackers dressed in military uniforms and wearing masks. The victims were en route from the nearby province of Beni Suef to visit the monastery.

Security and medical officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters, said the death toll stood at 28 but feared it could rise. According to Copts United news portal, only three children survived the attack. It was not immediately known how many of the victims were children.

Arab TV stations showed images of a badly damaged bus

along a roadside, many of its windows shattered and with numerous bullet holes. Footage of the interior of the bus showed bloodstains on the seats and shattered glass.

Ambulances are seen parked around the bus and bodies are lying on the ground, covered with black, plastic sheets. Another video purported to show about 10 bodies of mature men lying on the sand on the side of the road with pools of blood around them. Children screaming hysterically could be heard in the background.

The surge in attacks targeting Christians in Egypt has added to the challenges facing President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi's government as it struggles to contain the insurgency while pushing ahead with a reform program to revive the country's ailing economy that already has sent the cost of food and services soaring.

UK Police make new arrest over bombing

Associated Press

MANCHESTER, England — British police investigating the Manchester Arena bombing made a new arrest Friday while continuing to search addresses associated with the attacker who killed 22 people.

Seven other men are in custody in connection with Monday's blast, all are being held on suspicion of offenses violating the Terrorism Act. Their ages ranged from 18 to 38.

A 16-year-old boy who had been arrested was released without charge, police said.

Britain's security level has been upgraded to "critical," meaning officials believe another attack may be imminent.

Authorities are chasing possible links between the bomber, Salman Abedi, and militants in Manchester, elsewhere in Europe, and in North Africa and the Middle East.

Abedi, a college dropout who had grown up in the Manchester area, was known to security services because of his radical views. He was the son of Libyan parents who migrated to Britain in the early 1990s.

He reportedly was in contact with family members just before the attack.

The name of the man arrested early Friday and those of the seven others in custody were not released. No one has been charged in the bombing.

London police said extra security is being added for major sporting events this weekend including the FA Cup Final at Wembley Stadium.

Chief Superintendent Jon Williams said Friday that extra protective measures and extra officers are being deployed throughout the capital because of the increased threat level.

He said fans coming to soccer and rugby matches this weekend should come earlier than usual because of added security screening.

Duterte warns of 'contamination' by ISIS as troops, militants fight

Associated Press

ILIGAN, Philippines — Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte ordered his troops to crush militants who are fighting street battles with government forces in the south, warning Friday that the country is at a grave risk of "contamination" by Islamic State.

The city of Marawi, home to some 200,000 people, has been under siege by ISIS-linked militants since a government raid Tuesday night on a suspected hideout of Isnilon Hapilon, who is on Washington's list of most-wanted terrorists.

The raid went awry, and gunmen swept through the streets, fending off government forces and taking over large parts of the city. Duterte imposed martial law on the southern third of the nation earlier this week as the battles continued.

At least 44 people have died in the fighting, including 31 militants and 11 soldiers, officials said. It was not immediately clear whether civilians were among the dead. The violence has forced thousands of people to flee and has raised fears of growing extremism.

Duterte told soldiers in Iligan, a city near

Marawi, that he had long feared that "contamination by ISIS" loomed in the country's future. "You can say that ISIS is here already," he said.

He gave his troops a free hand.

Still, he also offered dialogue to militants who are not fighting on the streets.

"We can still talk about it," Duterte said. "But those who are out-and-out terrorists, and you cannot be convinced to stop fighting, so be it."

Hapilon is hiding out in the city under the protection of gunmen who are trying to find a way to "extricate" him, the country's military chief said.

In a sign that the longstanding problem of militancy in the south could be expanding, Solicitor General Jose Calida said foreigners were fighting alongside the gunmen in Marawi.

Ano also said foreign fighters were believed to be inside, but he was more cautious. "We suspect that but we're still validating," he said.

With much of Marawi a no-go zone, confusion reigned. One local police chief told the AP on Friday that he was fine — two days after Duterte announced he had been beheaded by militants.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Small sinkhole opens outside Trump's club

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A small sinkhole has opened on the road just outside President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

The Palm Beach Post reported that the 4-foot-by-4-foot hole was discovered Monday in Palm Beach County just west of one of the resort's entrances. It is near a new water main and isn't a threat to the president's property.

Trump has spent seven weekends at Mar-a-Lago since taking office, but it is now closed for the summer. Trump is on a nine-day trip that began in the Middle East and will end in Sicily.

Bear rips off bumper to get to doughnuts

CO STEAMBOAT SPRINGS — The allure of doughnuts was far too much for one Steamboat Springs resident.

The Steamboat Pilot & Today reported Todd and Kim Robertson awoke early Monday to a black bear trying to break into their doughnut delivery vehicle. The bear was so determined to enter the car that it ripped off the back bumper.

Kim Robertson said the bear no doubt was attracted to the scent of doughnuts pouring out of the couple's Ford Focus.

The Robertsons own Moose Watch Cafe in downtown Steamboat. They use the vehicle to make doughnut deliveries around town.

Todd Robertson said there were no doughnuts in the vehicle, which was parked in their driveway, at the time of the bear encounter. But even the leftover smell appeared to attract the animal.

UFOs over lake? Nope, just military flares

NY ROCHESTER — Strange lights appearing over Lake Ontario had Rochester area residents wondering if they were seeing UFOs.

It turns out the glowing objects were flares used in a training exercise by the Canadian military.

The Democrat and Chronicle reported the Royal Canadian Air Force's Canadian Joint Rescue Coordination Centre in Trenton, Ontario, was conducting flare training about sunset Tuesday.

Canadian officials said the flares were dropped from planes for illumination and were visible from the U.S. side of the lake.

Photographs and video of the lights were posted on Twitter accounts of people who were near the lakeshore at the time.

Brewery creates beer in honor of baby hippo

OH CINCINNATI — The Cincinnati Zoo's prematurely born hippo named Fiona is getting a new beer in her honor.

Listermann Brewing Co. is releasing a Team Fiona New England-style IPA. The hippo's care team helped brew the beer.

And the brewing company said 25 percent of the beer sales proceeds is being donated to the zoo's care team.

The brewing company describes the beer as having a soft mouth feel, hazy appearance with a fruit-juice flavor.

Fiona was born at the zoo in January, weighing just 29 pounds. She now weighs more than 100 pounds. Zoo caretakers are preparing to move her

to a group of hippos that includes her parents.

Service dog gets headshot in yearbook

VA FREDERICKSBURG — A Virginia high school student who attends school with a service dog found himself side-by-side with his canine in the school's yearbook photos.

Andrew Schalk, 16, has Type 1 diabetes and uses his dog, Alpha, to alert him when his blood sugar levels are off. The black Labrador retriever gives the teen his paw when his levels are too high or too low.

Alpha was there when Schalk had his picture taken for the Stafford High School yearbook, and the dog ended up getting his own headshot. The yearbook staff came across the picture and decided to include Alpha in the photos of the junior class. Staffer Grace Fuller told fredericksburg.com Alpha "is a part of this school now."

Andrew said Alpha has turned his diabetes "into a positive experience."

Monument's fans resort to low-budget sign

ME BENEDICTA — Supporters of a new national monument in Maine who are upset at the governor's refusal to allow road signs for the park took matters into their own hands.

Fans of Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument hung a banner advertising the park from a highway overpass above Interstate 95. The sign, which appears to be written on a bedsheet or a piece of canvas, says "KWW Exit 264" and appeared Wednesday.

Republican Gov. Paul LePage is refusing to let state

workers install official signs. Then-President Barack Obama created the park last year. A governor's spokesman said it would be "imprudent and premature" to install signs before completion of a 120-day review period ordered by President Donald Trump last month.

The park is 137 square miles near Mount Katahdin.

Thieves take inflatable obstacle course

AZ PHOENIX — Phoenix police are investigating a burglary involving a distinctive stolen object — a multicolored inflatable obstacle course.

Police said an open-topped red cargo trailer and the eight-piece obstacle course were stolen from a commercial yard in southwest Phoenix on May 7 or May 8.

According to police, the obstacle course is 180 feet long and 25 feet wide when inflated. It's valued at \$35,000.

Raccoon leaves thousands in the dark

FL KISSIMMEE — A raccoon is to blame for a power outage that left thousands of central Florida residents without power.

Chris Gent, the vice president of corporate communications for the Kissimmee Utility Authority, told the Orlando Sentinel that the raccoon climbed onto a 13,200-volt piece of equipment at a substation late Tuesday, causing three primary feeder lines to fail.

The outage left nearly 5,200 people without power for almost an hour. Gent said the raccoon did not survive.

From wire reports

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Cavs top Celtics, advance to Finals

Associated Press

BOSTON — The NBA Finals has its first “three-match,” courtesy of a King who passed His Airness.

LeBron James scored 35 points and passed Michael Jordan to become the NBA’s all-time playoff scoring leader as the Cleveland Cavaliers beat the Boston Celtics 135-102 on Thursday night to claim their third straight Eastern Conference title and another trip to the NBA Finals to meet the Golden State Warriors.

Kyrie Irving added 24 points and Kevin Love finished with 15 for the Cavs, who never trailed and led by as many as 39 points in one of their most dominating wins of the series. The Cavs set an NBA record by winning their 13th consecutive series closeout opportunity.

Cleveland’s 4-1 series win gives it a 12-1 record this post-season and sets up a third consecutive matchup with Western Conference champion Golden State, the team it beat in the Finals last season to claim the franchise’s first championship.

“I wear the number because of Mike,” James said. “I think I fell in love with the game because of Mike, just because of what he was able to accomplish. When you’re watching Michael Jordan it’s almost like a god. So I didn’t think I could be Mike.”

It will mark the seventh straight trip to the Finals for James, who hit a three-point late in the third quarter to nudge past Jordan on the playoff scoring list. He quickly flashed one finger as he backpedaled down the court.

In the postgame trophy presentation backstage, James spent most of it lingering in the background as his teammates celebrated.

But there’s no denying that his accolades are putting him in the orbit of Jordan, his boyhood idol.

“The biggest thing is I did it

just being me, I don’t have to score the ball to make an impact on the basketball game,” James said. “That was my mindset. If I’m not scoring the ball, how can I still make an impact on the game?”

As much as this series was about James, Irving helped turn the tide of the series with a 42-point effort in Game 4. But he said both he and his teammates continue to be inspired by their leader.

“He’s been the driving force, this entire playoff run, and all of us have just helped us along the way,” Irving said.

Coach Tyronn Lue said they’ve gotten tighter this season.

“This team is a crazy team. They just stayed resilient all year, got to the playoffs, and we really stepped our game up,” he said. “Now we can start focusing on Golden State to get ready. As of tonight, I’ll get started.”

Avery Bradley led Boston with 23 points.

The Cavaliers ceded the East’s top seed to the Celtics at the end of the regular season, but they displayed their superiority over the final two games to wrap up the series.

After allowing the Celtics to seize the early momentum in Game 4, the Cavs barely gave them the chance in Game 5.

The Celtics did their best to keep up, but the outside shooting, bench scoring and defense they relied on to stun Cleveland in Game 3 wasn’t there Thursday.

Celtics coach Brad Stevens said though he’s disappointed with how the season ended, he’s encouraged that no one in Boston’s locker room is satisfied just making it to the conference finals.

“I told our guys: ‘We made a lot of great strides, but this pain is part of the path to what we ultimately want to be,’” he said.

Penguins eliminate Senators on Kunitz’s 2OT game-winner

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Chris Kunitz spent a portion of the spring nursing a lower-body injury and wondering if his time with the Pittsburgh Penguins was over. The veteran forward’s contract is up this summer and he’s been around long enough to know how these things go, particularly when you’re 37.

“It’s not fun thinking about the future,” Kunitz said.

He found a pretty compelling way to put it off for at least four more games and push his team to the brink of history in the process.

Kunitz’s knuckling shot from outside the circle fluttered past Craig Anderson 5:09 into the second overtime to give the defending Stanley Cup champions a 3-2 victory over the Ottawa Senators in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals Thursday night.

Thrust alongside old line-mate Sidney Crosby as the game wore on, the two reconnected for a goal that moved the Penguins closer to becoming the first team since the 1998 Detroit Red Wings to win back-to-back titles. Crosby sent a soft backhand pass from the right faceoff circle to Kunitz and for a moment, it seemed like old times.

“With the way he was holding the stick you could tell he wanted it bad,” Crosby said. “I just tried to lay it there for him. I’ve seen him score from there pretty often. It was a huge goal for us, and a great reward for him for the way he played all night.”

Kunitz scored twice, his first two of the playoffs. Justin Schultz added the other in his return from an upper-body injury, and Matt Murray stopped 27 shots on his 23rd birthday. The Penguins will host Western Conference champion Nashville in Game 1 on Monday night.

Not bad for a team that

watched so many of its core players — from defenseman Kris Letang to Evgeni Malkin to Crosby — deal with some serious bumps along the way. And yet here they are on the doorstep to a title once again.

“If you look at the amount of guys who have played on this roster throughout the course of the year, it’s a lot of guys,” Crosby said. “The biggest step is ahead.”

Mark Stone and Ryan Dzingel scored for Ottawa. The Senators rallied twice to tie it, with Dzingel making it 2-2 with 5:19 left in regulation. Craig Anderson made 39 saves, but couldn’t get a handle on Kunitz’s shot as the Senators fell to 0-6 in Game 7s in franchise history.

Just don’t call them cursed. A year ago, Ottawa didn’t even make the playoffs yet found a way to push the Penguins to the 85th minute of Game 7 of the conference finals.

“We wanted to make them earn it and they earned it, rightfully so,” said Senators defenseman Erik Karlsson, who assisted on both of Ottawa’s goals and played the entire postseason with a pair of hair-line fractures in his left heel. “We got to give it to them. They were the better team.”

The Penguins, trying to become the first defending champion to return to the Final since Detroit in 2009, came in confident they would advance if they could replicate their dominant Game 6, when they were undone only by Anderson’s brilliance.

Pittsburgh has been nearly unflappable in the face of adversity under Mike Sullivan, and is now 13-2 in playoff games following a loss over the last two springs.

“I couldn’t be more proud of our team for just its ‘stick-to-it-iveness,’” Sullivan said. “The last four games of this series, we found our game.”

The next step, the last step, awaits.

Rossi places all his faith in pit crew

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — As the agonizing seconds ticked away last May, Alexander Rossi's frustration mounted on pit lane.

The first time his crew struggled with the fuel probe, Rossi dropped from 10th to 22nd. The second time, it knocked him back to 30th and seemingly out of contention in his first Indianapolis 500.

Somehow, team co-owner Bryan Herta helped the rookie compose himself. He then performed something of a racing miracle: He found a solution, made a mid-race strategy modification and managed to rebuild the trust between driver and pit crew during the 100th running of the showcase race. It was a combination that sent Rossi to an improbable drive to victory lane — barely. He ran out of fuel between the third and fourth turns on the final lap and coasted across the finish line at about 130 mph.

Whatever. It all made for a sweet celebration barbecue months later at Michael Andretti's home.

"It took 10 seconds," Rossi said Wednesday, reflecting on the seemingly endless wait in pit lane. "So you're pretty upset, for sure. You're pretty angry and then that anger turns to sadness when you realize that you probably aren't going to win the race."

Pit stops, of course, are critical to any driver's chances. A good one can help you win and a bad one can cost you a shot at the podium. In a typical Indy 500, each car pits after 25 to 30 laps so a crew of 11 can add fuel, change tires or make other tweaks. An average stop takes eight to 10 seconds, and the top teams get them done faster than that. Most teams pit seven or eight times and those 70 to 80 seconds are key.

Rossi stunned everyone last year by staying on the track for the final 36 laps, cutting the number of stops by one. It was a

move forced by circumstance.

What exactly went wrong on those first two pit stops still isn't clear.

Herta remembers physically changing out the fuel probe. Rossi described the problem as a human error, saying the probe was inserted at the wrong angle.

But the inexplicable often becomes the norm in racing, and during a 500-mile day, chances are that something will go awry as Herta has learned over the years.

From 1994-2006, Herta made five starts at Indy and was a model of consistency. He finished all but 17 total laps in his Indy starts and wound up third in 2005, fourth in 2004 and ninth in 1994. Rossi's win was his second in the 500 as a team owner.

So when things got sideways early in last year's race, Herta relied on his experience, cool demeanor and cerebral approach to turn things around.

"We take video of all our pit

stops, so whenever we have a problem we review the video. That's a real-time process," he said. "We talk about a lot of scenarios (before the race) and things we can do if we have problems, things we can do that will keep us in the race. The key is to be open to that."

Inside Gasoline Alley, teams prepare for everything and the pit crews take things seriously.

"Indy isn't a race that you play for the top five," Herta said. "You play your cards and try to give yourself a chance to win. We felt our best chance to win was one less stop than everybody else."

Even now, as he tries to become the first American to win back-to-back 500s since Al Unser in 1970-71, Rossi isn't quite sure how it worked out.

"I understand what we did," he said. "But the fact that we had two laps to go with 0.65 gallons of fuel, we defied a lot of odds."

Former Wimbledon champ Kvitova ready to return

Associated Press

PARIS — Only two months after picking up her racket for the first time following a knife attack at her home, Petra Kvitova will be playing at the French Open.

The two-time Wimbledon champion said Friday she will make her comeback at Roland Garros, although she still lacks power and strength.

"I knew this day would come," said Kvitova, who was attacked by an intruder last year. "I'm really happy that really here, the dream comes true."

Kvitova has missed all season while recovering from surgery on her racket-holding left hand. She sustained damage to the tendons in her left hand, along with injuries to all five fingers and two nerves, during the attack.

Doctors initially thought she would need more time be-

fore returning to tennis. But Kvitova's recovery was faster than expected and she said last month that she was signing up for the French Open, which begins Sunday, in hopes of being able to compete.

"It wasn't easy, but I'm happy that I work through this and I can play tennis and I can be in the draw," she said.

Kvitova, who won the Wimbledon title in 2011 and 2014 and climbed as high as No. 2 in the WTA rankings, was not allowed to speak about the attack itself because a police investigation is still ongoing. However, she spoke about the anxiety associated with her dreadful experience.

"I didn't sleep well the days after, but I wasn't really staying alone," she said. "From the beginning I was really feeling really weird when I went in the city or somewhere. I was

always staring to the guys and looking if there are no strangers there. But with the time, it's better."

Kvitova also provided details on the intense rehabilitation process that preceded her "last-minute" decision to try her luck in Paris.

"I worked very hard behind the scenes," she said. "From the beginning I had this hand in a splint for two months, and even then I was practicing every day, always putting the splint away and trying to make this scar softer. So from the second day after surgery I started to work with that, which was kind of easy, just passive work with the fingers. I couldn't move them."

Kvitova got rid of the splint after two weeks and started to move her fingers slightly. She said she can't still move them completely.

Kvitova also consulted with

a hand specialist in the French city of Grenoble every month and she started practicing with a racket at the end of March.

"I hit a few forehands with soft balls from the net, and it felt very, very weird," she said. "I didn't really have touch in the hand for holding the racket. I'm happy that I didn't have to change any techniques or something. Everything seems OK. Of course the hand doesn't have that power and the strength yet, but I'm working on it. Hopefully one day will be everything perfect."

Kvitova will open her campaign on the red clay against 86th-ranked Julia Boserup. She is making her ninth appearance at Roland Garros, where she reached the semifinals in 2012.

"Not many people believe that I can play tennis again. So I'm happy that I can play."

Ryu, Maeda lead Dodgers past Cards

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Hyun-Jin Ryu made his first major league relief appearance for the Los Angeles Dodgers, tossing four scoreless innings to earn his first career save.

Taking the career starter out of his comfort zone required careful deliberation among the front office, doctors and Ryu, who admittedly wasn't thrilled at the idea.

He worked in relief of starter Kenta Maeda, who rallied the Dodgers to a 7-3 victory over the St. Louis Cardinals on Thursday night.

"Those two guys back-to-back in a tandem situation is pretty lethal," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Ryu allowed two hits and struck out two. He became the second Dodger to record a save in his first career relief appearance since Charlie Hough on Aug. 12, 1970, at Pittsburgh. It was Ryu's first relief outing as a pro since 2011 in the Korean Baseball Organization.

"My initial reaction was I didn't understand where the

front office was coming from," Ryu said through a translator. "I'm a starter at heart. I believe I'll get another start. It was just a one-time appearance so you can't really say I'm good at this role."

Roberts showed up an hour late to his pregame media availability explaining he had been on conference calls with doctors to discuss players like Rob Segedin. Eventually, Roberts admitted management was trying to figure out Ryu's role.

"It's been in the works for a few days and just trying to find the right time to plug him in," Roberts said after the game.

Ryu, who had left shoulder and elbow surgeries over the last two seasons, was removed from the rotation after a 7-2 win over Miami on May 18. He is 2-5 with a 4.75 ERA this season.

"It definitely wasn't the same," Ryu said, referring to his pregame routine. "The most difficult part was warming up before the game. I didn't know exactly when I would be put into the game, so there was some difficulty there."

Roberts credited Ryu's "un-

selfishness to do something that he's never done before."

However, Roberts added, "This is not something that we plan on being permanent. It's just to make sure we build his pitch count up, get him some consistent innings."

Asked before the game if Ryu would be traded, Roberts replied, "I'm not going to answer that."

Maeda fell into a 3-0 hole in the first inning of his first start for the Dodgers in two weeks coming off the disabled list.

"It was a little hard getting into the game with the long lay-off," he said through a translator. "It took some time to get my rhythm back."

Maeda (4-2) drove in the tying and go-ahead runs with a two-out single in the fourth off Michael Wacha and turned an inning-ending double play in the fifth to help the Dodgers take two of three from the Cardinals.

Maeda allowed three runs and seven hits in five innings, struck out four and walked two.

He missed 13 games with a

tight left hamstring while on the DL since May 11. Maeda got off to a rocky start in his return, giving up Jedd Gyorko's two-run double and Yadier Molina's RBI single in the first that extended his major league-leading hitting streak to 14 games.

The Dodgers took over from there.

Chase Utley homered for the first time this season leading off the second. Yasiel Puig's two-out single in the fourth made it 3-2 before Maeda's two-run single gave the Dodgers a 4-3 lead. He was out stretching at second.

Maeda hit Matt Carpenter in the left foot leading off the fifth. With one out, Maeda started an inning-ending double play when Molina grounded to the mound.

Wacha (2-2) gave up a season-worst six runs and seven hits in a season-low four-plus innings. The right-hander struck out five and walked two. The six runs were the most he's allowed since May 19, 2016, against Colorado.

Ray masterful on road as Arizona downs Milwaukee

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Robbie Ray pitched seven innings of two-hit ball to lower the NL's second-best road ERA to 0.57, Gregor Blanco and Chris Owings homered, and the Arizona Diamondbacks beat the Milwaukee Brewers 4-0 Thursday night for their ninth win in 10 games.

Ray (4-3), coming off a dominant performance against San Diego in his last start, did not allow a run for the second straight outing. He struck out nine and walked none to send the Brewers to their season-worst fourth straight loss.

Arizona is 11 games above .500 for the first time since 2011.

Cubs 5, Giants 1: Kris Bryant, Jason Heyward and Ben

Zobrist hit solo homers, and host Chicago won its third straight.

Spot starter Eddie Butler (2-0) allowed one run and four hits in five innings.

Mariners 4, Nationals 2: Nelson Cruz greeted reliever Jacob Turner (2-3) a three-run homer in the sixth inning that overturned a 2-0 deficit, and visiting Seattle stopped a five-game losing streak.

Ariel Miranda (4-2) allowed two runs, three hits and three walks in five innings.

Pirates 9, Braves 4: Ivan Nova (5-3) allowed four runs and 10 hits in 8¹/₃ innings for visiting Pittsburgh, and Adam Frazier hit a three-run homer.

Pittsburgh pounded Bartolo Colon (2-5), who a day after his 44th birthday allowed

seven runs and 10 hits in five innings.

Phillies 2, Rockies 1: Tommy Joseph hit a tying home run in the seventh inning for Philadelphia and a winning single against Scott Oberg (0-1) in the 11th after Michael Saunders' one-out double, stopping visiting Colorado from a four-game sweep.

Rays 4, Angels 0: Matt Andriese (5-1) allowed six hits over eight innings, Colby Rasmus drove in four runs and host Tampa Bay salvaged a four-game split.

Tommy Hunter got three outs to complete a six-hitter.

Padres 4, Mets 3: Dinelson Lamet overpowered host New York in his major league debut and San Diego won on a rainy night.

Rafael Montero (0-4) allowed two runs during a 45-pitch first inning, including a bases-loaded walk to Matt Szczur.

Red Sox 6, Rangers 2: Drew Pomeranz (4-3) pitched six strong innings and tied his career high with 11 strikeouts to lift host Boston past Texas.

Xander Bogaerts and Deven Marrero hit their first home runs of the season helping Boston to its fourth straight win.

Astros 7, Tigers 6: Jake Marisnick hit a tiebreaking home run in the eighth inning for his teams fourth homer of the game, lifting host Houston over Detroit.

The Tigers tied it 6-6 in the top of the eighth when Jose Iglesias doubled off reliever Luke Gregerson (2-1) to drive in Andrew Romine.