

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, May 12, 2018

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Carrier's price tag keeps climbing

Bloomberg

The Navy's costliest vessel just got pricier, breaching a \$12.9 billion cap set by Congress by \$120 million, the service told lawmakers this week.

The extra money for the USS Gerald R. Ford built by Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc. is needed to replace faulty propulsion components damaged in a January failure, extend the vessel's post-delivery repair phase to 12 months from the original eight months and correct deficiencies with the "Advanced Weapons Elevators" used to move munitions from

deep in the ship to the deck.

The elevators on the ship, designated CVN 78, need to be fixed "to preclude any effect on the safety of the ship and personnel," the Naval Sea Systems Command said in a statement to Bloomberg News. "Once the adjustment is executed, the cost for CVN 78 will stand at \$13.027 billion, the Navy said.

In addition to informing Congress that the spending lid has been breached, the Navy will have to let lawmakers know how it will shift funds to make up the difference.

Navy officials didn't disclose the propulsion failure or el-

evator problems during budget hearings before Congress in recent weeks, and House and Senate lawmakers didn't ask about it. The Navy is seeking approval in the fiscal 2019 defense request to accelerate purchase of the fourth carrier in the new Ford class by bundling it into a contract with the third. It expects to request congressional support over the next few months for what's now an estimated \$58 billion program.

The Ford's propulsion system and elevator flaws are separate from reliability issues on its troubled aircraft launch and recovery systems.

After its delivery last May, the ship operated for 70 days and completed 747 shipboard aircraft launches and recoveries, exceeding the goal of about 400, the Navy said.

None of the 11 weapons elevators are operational but at least two are being used for testing "to identify many of the remaining developmental issues for this first-of-class system," the Navy has said. The command said all 11 elevators "should have been complete and delivered with the ship delivery" in May 2017.

US fighters intercept Russian bombers

The Washington Post

Two Russian long-range bombers were intercepted off the coast of Alaska by a pair of F-22 Raptor fighter jets Friday, the military said.

The Tu-95 bombers were flying in the Air Defense Identification Zone in the Bering Sea north of the Aleutian Islands, where they were visually identified and shadowed by the U.S. jets at 10 a.m., said Navy Capt. Scott Miller, a North American Aerospace Defense Command spokesman.

The bombers did not enter North American sovereign airspace, he said in a statement. Miller declined to say how close the bombers came to U.S. land.

Friday's encounter was the first of its kind in just more than a year, Miller said. A similar incident occurred off Alaskan waters in April 2017 in what U.S. officials have described as routine if not tense encounters between adversarial aircraft

where territorial lines meet.

The identification zone extends about 200 miles off the Alaskan coast and is mostly international airspace, Miller said, though Russian military activity will often prompt an in-kind response for U.S. warplanes. Intercepts in the zone occurred about 60 times from 2007 to 2017, The New York Times reported last year.

Miller said the Russian bombers, decades-old aircraft classified by NATO as the "Bear," were flying in accordance with international norms. The aircraft are capable of carrying nuclear bombs, but it's unclear what weapons they had on board, if any.

A Russian Defense Ministry statement released Friday diverged from the U.S. military account. They said the bombers were escorted by fighters and a reconnaissance jet.

Miller said that was not true. "This was a safe intercept,

which did not include a Russian recon plane, and no Russian fighters were present," he said Saturday.

It was not clear if the Russian air operation was an opportunity for real-world training or if it was in response to U.S. and NATO military operations elsewhere. Last week, Russia scrambled jets four times in response to foreign reconnaissance flights near its border, the Russian news service Interfax reported.

Aircraft intercepts, flybys and shadowings have escalated in recent years after Russian military activity and occupation in Crimea and eastern Ukraine beginning in 2014.

Earlier this month, a Russian Sukhoi Su-27 fighter jet flew within 20 feet of a U.S. P-8 surveillance aircraft over the Baltic Sea — a minuscule distance considering the aircraft move at hundreds of miles an hour — in an incident the U.S. military

called safe but unprofessional.

Friday's incident was relatively routine, but more aggressive maneuvers have worried defense officials and diplomats who said the encounters may eventually cause collisions or miscalculations that lead to a shoot-down.

A report issued in 2014 by the European Leadership Network, a London-based think tank, documented almost 40 incidents that together "add up to a highly disturbing picture of violations of national airspace, emergency scrambles, narrowly avoided midair collisions, close encounters at sea, simulated attack runs, and other dangerous actions happening on a regular basis over a very wide geographical area," according to the report. The report was only compiled for 2014 and not for the subsequent years.

Johnson killed while ‘engaging the enemy’

The Washington Post

No figure in the ambush in Niger has commanded more attention than U.S. Army Sgt. La David T. Johnson, who fell off the military’s radar for nearly two days during a hectic search and whose widow accused President Donald Trump of stumbling over her late husband’s name during a condolence call.

How the trained Army mechanic from Florida went from being deemed “missing” by the U.S. military to “killed in action” became a central question in the months after the incident, which also killed three other U.S. soldiers and marked the single deadliest military operation for U.S. forces in Africa since the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu.

An official version of events released Thursday by the Pentagon described a harrowing scene in which Johnson, 25, and two of his partner soldiers from Niger were attempting to get back in their vehicle to flee enemy fire, only to end up running into the brush as Islamic State fighters blocked them from escaping and pursued them to their deaths.

The 11 American soldiers in Johnson’s unit were traveling with a larger group of Nigerien partner forces when they were ambushed on the way out of a meeting with local leaders in the village of Tongo Tongo. Islamic State affiliates were known to operate in the region, but U.S. forces were unaccustomed to having direct contact with them, let alone with an organized group including about 100 combatants.

“They had never seen anything in this magnitude — numbers, mobility and training,” Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, commander of U.S. Africa Command, said in a briefing at the Pentagon on Thursday. “It was a total tactical surprise in how that took place.”

In the middle of the ambush, Johnson was caught under enemy fire with three other members of his U.S. team and

‘They had never seen anything in this magnitude — numbers, mobility and training.’

Gen. Thomas Waldhauser
commander of U.S. Africa Command

about 25 partner Nigeriens, as Islamic State fighters began to envelop them from the east and south, according to a summary of the Pentagon investigation of the incident.

As it became increasingly clear that the troops were overwhelmed by the enemy, the U.S. team’s commander gave an order to break contact and retreat.

By then, according to the Pentagon, Johnson had emptied a vehicle-mounted M240 machine gun on the Islamic State fighters and switched to an M2010 sniper rifle while taking cover at the rear of his vehicle. He acknowledged the order before attempting to climb into the driver’s seat and get away with two Nigerien partner soldiers.

But as the other vehicles in the convoy took off, the three soldiers found themselves pinned down. They “were driven back to their prone positions by accurate and heavy enemy fire,” the Pentagon report said. “Unable to reach the vehicle and with enemy forces rapidly closing on their position, they were forced to evade on foot.”

In other words, they set off running. Islamic State fighters were in pursuit.

The first Nigerien soldier ran west for about 460 meters before he was gunned down by the combatants. The second Nigerien soldier made it another 110 meters but was also picked off.

Johnson continued running, eventually finding cover under what the U.S. military described as a thorny tree three-fifths of a mile from the vehicle.

But Johnson was outnumbered. First, the enemy fighters fired on him with a vehicle-mounted heavy machine gun.

Then, they zeroed in on the young sergeant with smaller firearms, killing him alone in the West African brush some 5,300 miles from his Florida home.

On Thursday, the Pentagon sought to dispel earlier accounts in the media offered by Nigerien villagers suggesting that Johnson had been captured alive or found with his hands tied.

“The enemy did not capture SGT L. Johnson alive,” the report said. His “hands were not bound and he was not executed but was killed in action while actively engaging the enemy.”

A U.S. military official with knowledge of the investigation said investigators based the conclusion that Johnson was not bound or executed on several pieces of evidence, including an examination of his remains. No ligature marks were found on his wrists or hands, and they were not bound when his remains were recovered by U.S. troops, the official said, speaking on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the investigation.

The official said Johnson was shot as many as 20 times, including at least once in the head. The military based its conclusion that he was not executed on a lack of powder burns to the head, which would have indicated that he was shot with a gun to his skull.

The U.S. military said its investigators interviewed 143 witnesses, including survivors of the attack, in researching the report. It cautioned that the depiction of Johnson’s final moments wasn’t based on witness accounts but rather “solely on evidence recovered during the

course of the investigation.”

A national scandal erupted after Johnson’s widow, Myeshia, expressed her concerns about her phone call with Trump. But what also made Johnson’s case so exceptional was the time it took the U.S. military to locate his body after the attack.

A Nigerien quick-reaction force identified the remains of the three other American troops who died in the ambush the same day and immediately transferred them to American custody. The militants had attempted to take their remains away in vehicles, but abandoned the effort when French fighter jets roared overhead in a show of force, according to U.S. military officials.

Nigerien and American forces continued to search for Johnson through the night of the attack until nearly 6 a.m. the following morning, but they couldn’t find him and returned to their base.

According to the Pentagon, Johnson was found about 48 hours later. Cloutier said the Army sergeant had run a long way — some 960 meters — from where he was last seen by his fellow soldiers, complicating the efforts to determine the whereabouts of his remains.

After the attack, Tongo Tongo’s chief and another man from the village provided accounts of the aftermath of the ambush to *The Washington Post*. They said they found Johnson’s body with his hands tied behind his back. The U.S. military disputed that at the time, saying there was no evidence his hands were tied.

Reached by phone late Thursday, the two villagers — Mounkaila Alassane and Adamou Boubacar — stood by their story but declined to say more.

The military re-emphasized its account on Thursday, saying his body wasn’t treated any differently from the other soldiers killed in the attack.

Pompeo wants partnership with N. Korea

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States aspires to have North Korea as a “close partner” and not an enemy, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, noting that the U.S. has often in history become good friends with former adversaries.

Pompeo said he had told North Korean leader Kim Jong Un of that hope during his brief visit to Pyongyang earlier this week, during which he finalized details of the June 12 summit between Kim and President Donald Trump and secured the release of three Americans imprisoned in the country.

He said he made clear that if North Korea gets rid of its nuclear weapons in a permanent and verifiable way, the U.S. is willing to help the impoverished nation boost its economy and living standards to levels like those in prosperous South Korea.

“We had good conversations about the histories of our two nations, the challenges that we have had between us,” Pompeo told reporters at a news conference Friday with South Korea’s

visiting foreign minister, Kang Kyung-wha. “We talked about the fact that America has often in history had adversaries who we are now close partners with and our hope that we could achieve the same with respect to North Korea.”

He did not mention adversaries by name, but Pompeo and others have often noted that the U.S. played a major role in rebuilding Japan and the European axis powers in the wake of World War II.

“If North Korea takes bold action to quickly denuclearize, the United States is prepared to work with North Korea to achieve prosperity on the par with our South Korean friends,” he said.

Kang praised the upcoming meeting between Trump and Kim in Singapore as a “historic” opportunity, but added a few notes of skepticism as well. Amid concerns that North Korea will demand the U.S. withdraw its troops from neighboring South Korea, Kang emphasized that the U.S. military presence there must be “a matter for the U.S.-ROK alliance

N. Korea to hold ‘ceremony’ to dismantle nuke test site

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea says it will hold a “ceremony” for the dismantling of its nuclear test site on May 23-25 in what would be a dramatic but symbolic event to set up leader Kim Jong Un’s summit with President Donald Trump next month.

North Korea’s Foreign Ministry said Saturday that all of the tunnels at the country’s northeastern testing ground will be destroyed by explosion, and that observation and research facilities and ground-based guard units will also be removed.

The North said it plans to invite journalists from the United States, South Korea, China, Russia and Britain to inspect the process.

first and foremost,” using an acronym for South Korea’s official name, the Republic of Korea.

She said the U.S. troop presence in the South for the past 65 years has played a “crucial role for deterrence,” peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, she said, any change

in the size of the U.S. forces in South Korea should not be on the table at the summit.

Since Trump announced plans to hold a summit with Kim, questions have been raised continually about whether the two leaders have the same objective in mind when they speak about “denuclearization.”

Trump takes small steps on drug prices

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s long-promised plan to bring down drug prices would mostly spare the pharmaceutical industry he previously accused of “getting away with murder.” Instead he focuses on private competition and more openness to reduce America’s prescription pain.

In remarks at the White House Rose Garden on Friday, Trump called his plan the “most sweeping action in history to lower the price of prescription drugs for the American people.” But it does not include his campaign pledge to use the massive buying power of the government’s Medicare program to directly negotiate lower prices for seniors.

That idea has long been supported by Democrats but is a nonstarter for drugmakers and most Republicans in Congress. Democratic Rep. Lloyd Doggett, of Texas, dismissed Trump’s plan as “a sugar-coated nothing pill.”

The administration will pursue a raft of

old and new measures intended to improve competition and transparency in the drug pricing system. But most of the measures could take months or years to implement, and none would stop drugmakers from setting sky-high prices.

Drugmakers generally can charge as much as the market will bear because the U.S. government doesn’t regulate medicine prices, unlike most other developed countries.

Trump’s list of 50 proposals, dubbed American Patients First, includes:

- A potential requirement for drugmakers to disclose the cost of their medicines in television advertisements.
- Banning a pharmacist “gag rule,” which prevents druggists from telling customers when they can save money by paying cash instead of using their insurance.
- Speeding up the approval process for over-the-counter medications, so people can buy more drugs without prescriptions.
- Reconsidering how Medicare pays for some high-priced drugs administered at doctors’ offices.

Those ideas avoid a direct confrontation with the powerful pharmaceutical lobby, but they may also overwhelm Americans seeking relief from escalating prescription costs.

Democrats pounced on Trump for not pursuing direct Medicare negotiations, an idea he championed before reaching the White House.

“This weak plan abandons the millions of hard-working families struggling with the crisis of surging drug prices,” said Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, in a statement.

Pharmaceutical investors and analysts expressed relief after the announcement, and shares of most top drugmakers rose Friday afternoon, including Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson and Eli Lilly.

Some parts of the plan were previously proposed in the president’s budget proposal sent to Congress, including providing free generic drugs to low-income seniors and sharing rebates from drugmakers with Medicare patients. Other parts could be implemented directly by the administration.

John McCain's up for a fight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — John McCain is not signing off quietly.

As in so much of the senator's extraordinary life, the rebellious Republican is facing this challenging chapter — battling brain cancer — in his own rule-breaking way, stirring up old fights and starting new ones. Rarely has the sickbed been so lively.

McCain is promoting a new book, delivering a counter-punch of ideals contrary to President Donald Trump's running of the White House. McCain's long-distance rejection of CIA director nominee Gina Haspel's history with torture goaded former Vice President Dick Cheney into a fresh debate over waterboarding and other now-banned interrogation techniques. On Friday, friends rallied to defend McCain against a White House official's cruel joke that his positions don't matter because "he's dying anyway."

If this is Washington's long goodbye to a sometimes favorite son, it's also a reemergence of old resentments and political fault lines that continue to split the nation.

Perhaps no one should have expected anything less from the 81-year-old senator, who can be crotchety and cantankerous but is also seen by many,

both in and out of politics, as an American hero, flaws and all.

Former Vice President Joe Biden said Friday as McCain "fights for his life, he deserves better — so much better."

Said House Speaker Paul Ryan, "His legacy is so long that John McCain is a hero to us all."

McCain was diagnosed in July with glioblastoma, an aggressive brain cancer. He left Washington in December and few expect him to return. Up-and-down reports of his health shift every few days.

A steady stream of visitors have stopped by the McCain family ranch in Arizona — including Michael Bloomberg, the former mayor of New York, on Friday.

Close friend and political ally Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., visited McCain last week, and the two watched an old movie and talked about McCain's imprint on politics.

Graham said he told McCain he will leave behind a long list of Republicans — and Democrats — he has mentored, Graham included.

"Your legacy is the people you affected," Graham said he told his friend. "John McCain's going to have a hell of a legacy."

Not everyone, though, is so keen to listen to McCain these

days.

Most Republican senators are not heeding his advice to reject Haspel, who was chief of base of a detention site where terror suspects were waterboarded. McCain lived through years of captivity during the Vietnam War.

Trump has suggested reviving the now-banned brutal interrogation techniques. And Cheney, who was an architect of the post-Sept. 11, 2001, strategy, said he would keep the program active and ready for deployment, and doesn't think it amounted to torture.

One retired Air Force general, Tom McInerney, called McCain "songbird John" on the same station this week for allegedly providing information to the North Vietnamese while he was a prisoner of war. McCain has said he gave inaccurate information after being tortured. Fox said McInerney would not be invited back on its business or news channels.

Still, one of McCain's longtime sparring partners, Sen. Rand Paul R-Ky., re-affirmed his opposition to Haspel on Friday.

In explaining his opposition, Paul said, "We shouldn't reward somebody who participated in torture, really still has trouble saying and articulating that it's an immoral thing."

Tourism to Hawaii urged despite volcano

Associated Press

VOLCANO, Hawaii — Hawaii tourism officials are hoping Kilauea's eruption won't deter travelers from visiting the state's largest island, even

Travel industry executives note most of the Big Island is free of eruption threats from Kilauea.

as geologists warn the volcano could soon shoot large boulders out of its summit.

Travel industry executives note most of the Big Island is free of eruption threats from Kilauea, which

began spurting lava into a neighborhood last week.

George Szigeti, CEO of the Hawaii Tourism Authority says the Big Island is "immense" and there are large parts that are unaffected by the volcano.

President Donald Trump on Friday declared a major disaster exists on the Big Island. The move will make federal financial assistance available to state and local governments as they repair roads, public parks, schools and water pipes damaged by the eruption.

Mont. floodwaters near highest level in 100 years

Associated Press

MISSOULA, Mont. — Montana rescuers pulled a man from raging floodwaters and authorities warned of dangerous debris being swept downstream as water levels continued rising Friday in rivers and streams across the western half of the state.

The Clark Fork River in Missoula was expected to crest more than a foot above major flood stage late Saturday — its highest level in 100 years. It could rise even higher this week, according to National Weather Service forecasters. Heavy rains in recent days compounded the deluge caused primarily by melting mountain snows.

Floodwaters already have inundated some houses and trailer homes in a low-lying neighborhood in Montana's second-largest city.

Many residents of the more than 65 houses under evacuation orders refused to leave. That put both residents and emergency personnel in danger as debris surged downstream, including sheds, a propane tank and the remains of at least one trailer home that was pushed off its foundation and broke apart in the floodwaters, authorities said.

The rescued man was using a small raft to reach a camp for transients on a partially submerged island on the Clark Fork Thursday night.

Firefighters at the river's edge noticed him hanging onto a tree and still in the raft, Holtz said. Rescuers used a boat to pull him to safety.

River levels are forecast to drop slightly with the arrival of cooler weather early this week, then spike to even higher levels by week's end, said meteorologist Ryan Leach.

"We're very confident it's going to be above major flood stage for at least the next week," Leach said.

Personnel from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers were inspecting area levees but they were not expected to be topped, said Mel Holtz, a firefighter and spokesman for the flood response effort.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Howling pug's apology makes noise online

PA PITTSBURGH — A Pittsburgh pug's apology for his separation anxiety-induced howling is making some noise.

The 11-year-old dog named Charleston Chew and his owner, Sharla Wilson, just moved into a new apartment.

She told KDKA-TV Charleston is nearly blind and ever since his vision started going, his separation anxiety ramped up. Since the move, he's been bumping into walls and doesn't know where things are.

She said he'll meander off into a corner and start howling until she rescues him.

So Wilson wrote up an apology from Charleston and taped it to a neighbor's door. It explains he's old and very sorry for his howling.

Neighbor Megan Jones snapped a photo of the note and posted it on Twitter, saying, "You can howl all you want Charleston, honey!"

Trooper rescues pup that's 'hot doggin' it'

MA WORCESTER — A Massachusetts state trooper rescued a dog running loose in the middle of the highway with the bribe of a delicious snack.

Trooper Nick D'Angelo responded to reports of a pup running loose along Interstate 190 in Worcester on Wednesday morning.

State police said the dog, named Dozier, was "hot doggin' it," down the road as stopped motorists tried to capture him.

D'Angelo lured Dozier over to safety with some homemade deer jerky.

Dozier was reunited with his owner.

Bus driver accused of texting, seeking jokes

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Minneapolis-area school bus driver is accused of texting while driving and looking up jokes on her cellphone.

Brenda Carsten, 39, was charged in Anoka County District Court with more than a dozen misdemeanor and gross-misdemeanor charges of child endangerment. Her first court appearance is June 6.

Authorities said the charges stem from video and audio taken on the bus in Blaine on Feb. 6 showing Carsten driving erratically and children moving around the bus while it was on the road.

Carsten is accused of having both hands off the steering wheel while looking up "your mama" jokes on her phone. At one point, authorities said, she handed the cellphone to a student to read the jokes over the bus intercom.

County has 2nd odd groundhog encounter

MD ELDERSBURG — Authorities said a groundhog tried to attack a Maryland woman just days after a deputy shot and killed another groundhog that was acting oddly.

Humane Society of Carroll County Executive Director Karen Baker told the Carroll County Times the groundhog came after and "made contact" with a woman in an Eldersburg parking lot Tuesday. She believes it tried to bite the woman, who was able to get into her car without injury.

The groundhog was taken to the shelter to be euthanized.

Baker said the lot wasn't close to the Eldersburg road where a Carroll County sheriff's deputy shot a groundhog that was

blocking traffic and behaving unusually.

Police: Woman, 95, is a slipper slapper

FL DAYTONA BEACH — A 95-year-old Florida woman landed in jail after calling police for help during an argument with her defiant granddaughter.

Daytona Beach Police Chief Craig Capri told the Daytona Beach News-Journal that Hattie Reynolds probably wasn't a threat, but her admission of slapping her granddaughter in the face with a slipper qualified as domestic violence.

An arrest report said Reynolds told police Saturday that she wanted Janeen Williams, 46, out of her house because she was in bed soaking up the air conditioning Reynolds pays for. When Williams began screaming and swearing at her, Reynolds said she slapped her with the slipper.

Police handcuffed Reynolds and took her to jail for the night. Records show a judge released her on her own recognizance.

Firefighter gets creative with proposal

NC FAYETTEVILLE — Firefighters helped one of their own pull off a marriage proposal.

Fayetteville firefighter Ashton Hanway asked Lauren Wood to visit Station 17 on Friday to take some pictures. His captain suggested they stand on top of a truck.

An alarm sounded and two firefighters got into an adjacent truck. When they pulled out, they revealed a fire hose on the floor that spelled out: "Will you marry me?"

Hanway told The Fayetteville Observer he was trying to write in cursive and it took sev-

eral hours to do everything.

Wood, who said yes, said it was a complete shock. She described it as an "out-of-body experience."

The couple, who have been together for six years, are planning a 2019 wedding.

Couple get up-close view of peeping moose

NH MERRIMACK — A New Hampshire couple have gotten an up-close view of a moose that wandered into their yard, right up to their window.

The couple caught the moose's surprise visit on video and posted it on YouTube, where it received thousands of views since Tuesday morning. The video shows the moose nibbling leaves on a tree across the street outside the couple's Merrimack home and then walking up to the home and standing inches away from the camera.

Dog 'bride' in pricey pet wedding dies

NY NEW YORK — A little dog known for her role in a fundraiser deemed the world's priciest pet wedding has died.

Animal advocate Wendy Diamond said Baby Hope Diamond died this week at age 13.

The coton du tular participated in fundraisers for a host of charitable causes. She made it into Guinness World Records for playing the bride at "the Most Expensive Pet Wedding in History."

The 2012 gala in New York City cost over \$158,000 in donated luxury goods and raised over \$110,000 for a critical care ward at the Humane Society of New York.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

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

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Caps overpower Lightning in Game 1

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — There was no letdown for the Washington Capitals. Just more winning hockey.

Putting an emotional second-round victory over playoff nemesis and two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh behind them, the Caps got a power-play goal and assist from Alex Ovechkin in his Eastern Conference finals debut and beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-2 on Friday night.

Braden Holtby stopped 19 shots and Michal Kempny, Jay Beagle and Lars Eller also scored for the Caps, who are alive beyond the second round of the playoffs for the first time in Ovechkin's brilliant 13-year career.

"We had a really good start. We didn't give them much," Ovechkin said.

"I think it's we realized we just have to play our way," the

Washington captain added. "It doesn't matter which position we are, which round it is. Everybody was paying the price."

Steven Stamkos and Ondrej Palat scored for Tampa Bay, which trailed 4-0 heading into the third period.

Game 2 is Sunday night at Amalie Arena, where Tampa Bay also lost Game 1 in the second round against Boston.

"It's just one game. That's the way we have to look at it," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "We've got to get back to what got us to the conference final."

The Capitals dominated in improving to 6-1 on the road this postseason, with Kempny giving them an early 1-0 lead.

Ovechkin made it 2-0 a mere 5 seconds after the Lightning thought they had tied it in the closing seconds of the opening period. But Nikita Kucherov's would-be breakaway goal was waved off because Tampa Bay

had too many men on the ice.

T.J. Oshie won the ensuing faceoff in the Lightning zone, getting the puck to Evgeny Kuznetsov, who fed Ovechkin for the Washington superstar's ninth goal this postseason — 55th overall in 110 career playoff games — at 19:54 of the first.

"That gave us a real boost ... gave us some breathing room," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said.

Beagle and Eller scored in the first seven minutes of the second period for a 4-0 lead. Up to that point, the Lightning — the NHL's highest-scoring team during the regular season — had allowed as many goals as they had shots.

Tampa Bay replaced goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy with Louis Domingue after the starter allowed four goals on 25 shots through two periods.

Holtby lost his shutout when Stamkos, assisted by Kucherov

and Victor Hedman, scored at 3:45 of the third. Palat added his goal at 13:03, trimming Washington's lead to 4-2.

Stamkos and Kucherov had one shot between them in the first two periods.

The Lightning dropped the opener of a series for the second straight round. They rebounded from a lopsided Game 1 loss at home to Boston by winning four straight to advance to the conference finals for the third time in four years.

The Capitals defeated Columbus and Pittsburgh in six games to reach the conference finals for the first time since 1998, when they beat the Buffalo Sabres.

"That's a good hockey team over there, and they outplayed us tonight," Stamkos said. "In hindsight, we were in this same position in the last round and found a way to respond."

Celtics, Cavs intertwined since big trade

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Boston playoff star Jayson Tatum and Cleveland coach Tyronn Lue are cousins. The Cavaliers and Celtics might as well be.

The Eastern Conference's top two teams have been intertwined for more than a year — from a summer blockbuster trade, from opening night, from afar.

Although there were long stretches this season when it seemed at least unlikely, and maybe impossible, that the Celtics and Cavs would reach the conference finals, they're back again and meeting in the playoffs for the third time in four years.

The series everyone wanted. The one few expected to see.

And yet here they are: the odds-defying Celtics, guided by baby-faced coach Brad Stevens and prospering without injured stars Kyrie Irving and Gordon Hayward, ver-

sus the Cavs, who despite a massive roster makeover in February are rolling as 33-year-old LeBron James enhances his legend with every game.

"There's been a lot that's happened throughout the season with us and for them," Cavs forward Kevin Love said Thursday as Cleveland prepared for Sunday's series opener in Boston. "Both teams have raised their level of play and been through it, but are here now and have to lay it all on the line."

It's hard to process how much has changed for these teams since they played last May.

Major moves, injuries, upheaval.

After the Cavs beat the Celtics in five games in last year's conference finals to advance to their third straight NBA Finals, there were no hints the two franchises would ramp up their rivalry with a trade that caught their entire league, well, off-guard.

The Cavs succumbed to

Irving's trade demand — he was tired of playing in James' shadow — and sent the All-Star to Boston for Isaiah Thomas, a first-round draft pick, forward Jae Crowder and center Ante Zizic. The 5-foot-9 Thomas had bravely carried the Celtics in the 2017 postseason despite a balky hip and broken heart following his sister's death in a car crash.

With so many subplots, the league scheduled Boston at Cleveland in the season opener.

However, Irving's awkward reunion with James was quickly overshadowed by Hayward, Boston's big free-agent signing, grotesquely breaking his ankle just feet from the horrified Cavs bench. As Hayward left on a stretcher, the Celtics' season seemed to be riding to the hospital with him.

Boston, though, showed grit and reeled off 16 straight wins before injuries resurfaced. Marcus Smart had thumb sur-

gery and the Celtics lost Irving, who needed more knee surgery and won't get a crack at dethroning James.

Irving will watch this series from the bench. Thomas is much farther away.

He spent the first two months in Cleveland trying to get healthy, but wasn't the same when he came back and never connected with his new teammates.

With Thomas a mess and the season slipping away, Cavs general manager Koby Altman traded him on Feb. 8 to the Lakers for Jordan Clarkson and Larry Nance Jr.

James is now on a mission as he prepares to face the Celtics for the seventh time in the postseason. James is averaging 34.3 points, 9.4 rebounds and 9.0 assists in 11 games in these playoffs, which has included him making two buzzer-beaters, scoring 45 points in Game 7 to oust Indiana and dispatching Toronto with shocking ease.

Simpson ties mark at TPC Sawgrass

Associated Press

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla. — No one ever played a better round at the TPC Sawgrass than Webb Simpson.

For 16 holes, anyway.

With his sixth straight birdie on the back nine, Simpson became the first player to reach 11-under par for a single round at The Players Championship. The course record? Simpson couldn't resist thinking about a 59. All he had to do was navigate the shortest and scariest hole Friday afternoon on the Stadium Course.

He hardly missed anything all day except the island green on No. 17.

Splash!

"Just the wrong club," he said.

The consolation was enormous. Even with that double bogey, Simpson tied the Stadium Course record with a 9-under 63 and had a five-shot lead after 36 holes, the largest in the 45 years of this tournament.

"Everything is going in," he said. "You feel like no matter what, you're going to make it, and I grew up on an easy golf course so it reminded me of being back home, shooting low numbers. But at the same time, you're at the TPC Sawgrass, so you know that trouble is everywhere, as you guys saw with me on 17."

The sand wedge in the water on the 17th ruined his round, but not his day. Simpson couldn't miss putts he wasn't even trying to make, whether it was a 35-foot eagle putt on his second hole or a 30-foot birdie putt up the slope and into the cup on the 15th.

At that point, all he could was laugh.

And then he reached the 17th, playing 147 yards to a back pin, the light wind playing tricks with him. He kept backing off, consulting with his caddie as he tried to decide between sand wedge and pitching wedge.

"The wind seemed to be changing," he said, "and people were yelling at me to hit it."

The ball hit the wooden frame on the front of the green, caromed high in the air and landed on the back of the green with so much momentum that it rolled through the light collar of rough and disappeared into the water.

Simpson was the seventh player to shoot 63 on the Stadium Course — five since 2013 — and his 15-under 129 tied the 36-hole record set two years ago by Jason Day.

Charl Schwartzel (66), Patrick Cantlay (68) and Danny Lee (66) were five shots behind.

Tiger Woods at least gets to return on the weekend. He made the cut on the number (1-under 143) after a 71 in the easier morning conditions. Woods was outside the cut line until Jordan Spieth and Justin Thomas each made bogey on the 18th. Spieth three-putted from 35 feet, though he shot 68 and ended three straight years missing the cut. Rory McIlroy wasn't so fortunate. He was inside the cut line until hitting into the water on the 17th and making double bogey.

Conditions were ideal for scoring for the second straight day. Simpson took that to another level.

He ended the front nine with a 15-foot birdie putt on the par-5 ninth for a one-shot lead, and then he took off. Starting with an up-and-down at the par-5 11th, Simpson ran off six straight birdies — three straight from the 20-foot range, the most unlikely birdie with the one from behind the 15th green, and another up-and-down from left side of the green on the par-5 16th.

Only three other players have led by as many as three shots through 36 holes at The Players — Lanny Wadkins (3) in 1979, Greg Norman (3) in 1994 and Day (4) in 2016. All of them went on to win.

Briefly

Hawks hire 76ers assistant Pierce

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The Atlanta Hawks are hiring a young coach in Lloyd Pierce to lead a rebuilding team that is about to add even more youth.

The Hawks announced Friday they are giving Pierce his first head coaching job in the NBA, choosing a man who has been an assistant with Philadelphia and Memphis to rebuild the franchise.

"It was critically important to find a dynamic teacher who could connect with and develop our young core while instilling the culture and high standards we feel are necessary in a successful program," Hawks general manager Travis Schlenk said in a statement. "Lloyd Pierce checks every box, and we couldn't be more excited to have him leading the Atlanta Hawks into the future."

The Hawks have scheduled a Monday news conference to introduce Pierce.

Pierce, 42, spent the past five seasons as an assistant coach in Philadelphia where the 76ers just reached the Eastern Conference semifinals after finishing third in the conference with a 52-30 record. Pierce also spent two years as assistant coach with the Memphis Grizzlies, including 2013 when they reached the 2013 Western Conference finals.

More youth is coming in the June 21 NBA Draft. The Hawks have three first-round picks, so the rebuilding effort will gain momentum.

Pierce also has been an assistant coach with the Golden State Warriors in 2010-11, and he was assistant coach for player development with Cleveland between 2007-10, which included three playoff berths and a spot in the 2009 Eastern finals. Pierce started as an assistant coach at his alma mater at Santa Clara between 2002 and 2007. He played four seasons with two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash a teammate.

Gragson gets first Trucks win of season

KANSASCITY, Kan. — Noah Gragson won the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race Friday night at Kansas Speedway, starting from the pole and leading 128 of the 167 laps.

Driving Kyle Busch Motorsports' No. 18 Toyota, the 19-year-old Gragson took the lead when Myatt Snider ran out of fuel with five laps remaining.

Gragson won for the first time this season and the second in the series. The Las Vegas driver swept the first two stages, winning a week after wrecking late after starting from the pole in Dover.

"This is such a relief for a driver who had a hard week last week battling for the win," Gragson said. "We came back strong this weekend. Two consecutive poles. We led the most laps today."

Car owner Kyle Busch overcame late contact with Stewart Friesen and a run through the infield grass to finish second, 1.558 seconds back. Friesen finished third.

Thiem ousts Nadal, advances to final

MADRID — Dominic Thiem beat Kevin Anderson 6-4, 6-2 to advance to the Madrid Open final on Saturday.

The fifth-seeded Thiem arrived at the semifinals after dealing top-ranked Rafael Nadal his first loss on clay in a year.

Thiem beat the sixth-seeded Anderson after breaking both of his first service games in each set.

He will play second-seeded Alexander Zverev or Denis Shapovalov in Sunday's final.

Petra Kvitova goes after her third Madrid Open title when she plays Kiki Bertens in the women's final later on Saturday.

Hamels tops Verlander in Rangers' win

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Texas Rangers manager Jeff Banister said there was a noticeable edge to starter Cole Hamels when he took the mound on Friday night against the Houston Astros and that he “had that face.”

Hamels put his early season woes behind him, allowing just one hit over six innings to narrowly outduel Justin Verlander in a 1-0 win over the Astros.

Hamels (2-4) acknowledged that he did put extra pressure on himself to right the ship for the Rangers, who entered the day 15-24 at the bottom of the AL West standings.

“The situation of what’s going on, what we’re trying to accomplish and what we haven’t been able to accomplish — a lot of it starts from the top with the veteran guys,” Hamels said. “It starts from the first moment of the series, and when you’re playing a team like Houston, you definitely have to bring your A-game.”

He cruised through the first four innings without allowing a hit before Evan Gattis led off the fifth with a single that dribbled between third base and shortstop into left field.

Hamels allowed six baserunners — one hit, three walks and two hit batters — while striking out five. He entered the game having lost six of his previous seven decisions. Keone Kela earned his eighth save of the season, walking one in the ninth.

The Rangers finally got to Verlander (4-2) in the seventh. Nomar Mazara hit a leadoff double and Adrian Beltre and Joey Gallo drew consecutive walks to load the bases. Hinch brought in right-handed reliever Chris Devenski, who allowed Jurickson Profar’s sacrifice fly before striking out the next two batters to escape the inning without further damage.

In six innings, Verlander allowed three hits and one run while striking out seven. The Astros have mustered one run or less in three of Verlander’s nine starts so far this season.

MLB roundup

Maile atones for error with two HRs

Associated Press

TORONTO — Luke Maile made up for “the dumbest play” of his career with the biggest home run he’s ever hit.

Maile hit two homers, including a two-run shot in the 12th inning that gave the Toronto Blue Jays a 5-3 victory over the Boston Red Sox on Friday night.

Maile’s drive off Boston’s Brian Johnson (1-2) improved the Blue Jays to 5-0 in extra innings after they overcame a superb outing by Red Sox starter Chris Sale.

Curtis Granderson walked to begin the 12th and Maile followed with a drive to right.

Asked where the game-winning homer ranked among his career highlights, Maile said it was “probably number one.”

Maile also hit a game-tying homer off Sale in the seventh. It was the first multihomer game of his career. Maile went 3-for-5 with three RBIs.

“You’ve got to tip your cap,” Sale said. “He had himself a heck of a night.”

Maile, who came in without a home run since May 31, 2017, redeemed himself for a throwing error that led to the Red Sox taking a 3-2 lead in the fourth.

Brock Holt reached on a two-out fielder’s choice and scored from first base after Maile couldn’t hold a third strike against Sandy Leon, then threw high to first base.

“That obviously felt terrible,” Maile said. “That was the dumbest play of my entire career.”

Cubs 11, White Sox 2: Willson Contreras had two homers, two doubles and drove in a career-high seven runs on his bobblehead day to lead the Cubs over the crosstown White Sox.

Pirates 11, Giants 2: Starling Marte, Josh Bell and Jose Osuna hit two-run homers, Max Moroff added a three-run

blast and host Pittsburgh beat San Francisco in Andrew McCutchen’s return to PNC Park.

Nationals 3, Diamondbacks 1: Max Scherzer struck out 11 over seven innings of four-hit ball and Trea Turner led off the game with a home run to lead Washington over host Arizona.

Orioles 9, Rays 4: Manny Machado hit two home runs, including his eighth career grand slam, as host Baltimore won its third straight.

Athletics 10, Yankees 5: Khris Davis, Matt Chapman, Jed Lowrie and Matt Joyce all homered for Oakland, and host New York lost back-to-back games for the first time in more than a month.

Marlins 6, Braves 3: J.T. Realmuto had three hits, including his fifth homer, and Miami broke a four-game losing streak. Starlin Castro hit his second homer and drove in two runs for the host Marlins.

Royals 10, Indians 9: Andrew Miller, activated from the disabled list before the game, gave up Salvador Perez’s two-run homer in the seventh inning and Kansas City rallied to beat host Cleveland.

Twins 5, Angels 4: Eddie Rosario homered twice, Bobby Wilson hit a go-ahead sacrifice fly in the ninth inning, and the Twins rallied for a victory over the host Angels.

Brewers 11, Rockies 10 (10): Manny Pina hit a tying two-run homer with two outs in the ninth and Travis Shaw delivered a two-out RBI single in the 10th, lifting the Brewers to a victory over the host Rockies.

Cardinals 9, Padres 5: Paul DeJong homered and drove in a career-high four runs, and Jedd Gyorko, Marcell Ozuna, Harrison Bader and Tommy Pham also went deep to lead the Cardinals to a victory against the host Padres.

Harvey wins Reds debut

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Matt Harvey toed the rubber against Chase Utley and fell behind 3-0 facing his first batter in his Reds debut.

His next pitch was a 91-mph strike and then he got Utley to fly out to left for his first out in his first start since April 19.

From there, Harvey tossed four innings of one-hit ball and Cincinnati defeated the scuffling Los Angeles Dodgers 6-2 on Friday night, extending their season-high winning streak to four games.

“Everybody was saying we haven’t lost since they traded for me,” Harvey said. “I had to go out there and keep that going for everybody.”

Harvey struck out two and walked none in a 55-pitch outing that was cut short because of his lack of recent game competition. The right-hander’s fastball topped out in the mid-90s.

“I hadn’t seen that in a while. It was good to know it’s still in there,” said Harvey, whose velocity had been questioned. “I let one go and I took a peek just to see where I was at. It was nice.”

Harvey is seeking to revive his career after going 9-19 over the last three seasons with the Mets.

The team cut him last weekend and the last-place Reds acquired him Tuesday for catcher Devin Mesoraco and cash on Tuesday after Harvey declined a demotion to the minors. He was 0-2 with a 7.00 ERA in eight games, including four starts, for the Mets this season.

Harvey returned from Tommy John surgery in 2015 and helped the Mets reach their first World Series in 15 years. But he was 5-7 with a 6.70 ERA last season and was sidelined from mid-June to September because of a right shoulder injury. The 29-year-old has yet to regain the All-Star form he had in 2013.

“He really pitched efficient and executed a bunch of pitches,” catcher Tucker Barnhart. “If he’s able to build on that, it’s going to be great for us.”