

STARS AND STRIPES®

Tuesday, May 26, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Blue Ridge makes first port call in 70 days

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Sailors aboard the amphibious command ship USS Blue Ridge — at sea more than two months to avoid the coronavirus — finally went ashore for liberty in Okinawa over the weekend, according to the Navy.

The 7th Fleet's flagship moored at White Beach Naval Facility on Sunday, capping off its new record of 70 consecutive days at sea, according to a Navy statement issued that day. The previous record of 64 days was set nearly a half-century ago during the Vietnam War; the Blue Ridge passed that mark on May 17.

The Blue Ridge is the Navy's oldest operational warship and 2020 marks its 50th year in service. The 223-year-old USS Constitution is the Navy's oldest ship, but it does not deploy.

Sailors are allowed a "Safe Haven" liberty to come off the ship but prevent their exposure to the coronavirus, according to

the Navy statement. The crewmembers can only access "specific designated areas on the pier and neighboring beach," the statement said.

"It is important to realize that the Blue Ridge has maintained a COVID-free bubble since the outbreak," Blue Ridge commander Capt. Craig Sicola said in the statement. COVID-19 is the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

"We are taking extreme caution to retain this bubble by not allowing any human interaction with personnel outside the bubble and maintaining strict disinfecting procedures for items and equipment on the pier," he added.

The goal is to boost morale and benefit quality-of-life without exposing the crew to the virus that has sidelined other ships in the region, according to the Navy.

The USS Theodore Roosevelt spent about two months in Guam after a coronavirus outbreak ultimately infected about a fourth of the aircraft carrier's crew.

"It is not lost on me how difficult a longer

than normal deployment can be on top of the stress of the COVID pandemic on my Sailors and their families," Sicola said in the statement. "These types of port calls are absolutely required to restore our mental readiness, stay healthy, and enable us to fight another day."

Several recreational activities have been arranged for sailors in their designated liberty area, including wireless internet and sporting events, including softball, soccer and volleyball. Sailors can also swim in the ocean and lounge at the beach.

Sailors also could order personal items from the Navy Exchange to be delivered pierside during the limited liberty, according to the statement. The items are fully disinfected before they are brought aboard.

"Providing pierside delivery was an excellent way to help Sailors get the items they need to keep them running their best during deployment," the Blue Ridge's disbursing officer, Lt. j.g. Raymond Kosak, said in the statement.

Pentagon: 3rd US service member dies from virus

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A third U.S. service member has died from complications after contracting the coronavirus, the Pentagon said Tuesday, as reported cases among military troops surpassed 6,000 during Memorial Day weekend.

The Defense Department included the new death in its daily release of its latest coronavirus-related data. Officials did not immediately provide additional information about the death, including when or where the service member died or to which service he or she belonged.

The death was among three new deaths within the Defense Department community that the Pentagon reported since Friday. Two new Defense Department civilian employee deaths were also reported.

The latest spike in reported deaths during the long weekend brought the coronavirus-related fatalities worldwide among service members, their dependents, DOD

civilian workers and defense contractors to 35. Defense Department civilians have been the hardest hit among that group with 18 deaths. Five military dependents and 9 contractors have died since the pandemic began earlier this year.

The reports of the death Tuesday came after the Pentagon reported five deaths within its community last week.

As of Tuesday, the Pentagon said 9,173 DOD community members had contracted the disease.

Service members accounted for the vast majority of those cases. The Pentagon said 6,118 troops had tested positive. Among them, 165 had spent some amount of time in a hospital and 3,460 have since recovered.

The Navy reported the most cases with 2,376, as of Tuesday. The Army, the largest military service, reported 1,315 cases. The Air Force reported 475 cases, the Marine Corps reported 543 and 1,278 members of the Army and Air National Guard have tested positive for the virus. The Pentagon

also said another 131 service members assigned to other agencies had contracted the coronavirus.

Among its other categories, the Pentagon reported that 1,433 DOD civilian employees, 1,042 military dependents and 580 defense contractors had contracted the disease as of Tuesday.

The latest service member's death is the first since Navy Chief Petty Officer Robert Thacker Jr. died of complications of the coronavirus April 13 at U.S. Naval Hospital Guam.

The 41-year-old sailor was among more than 1,000 crew members to contract the disease aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, by far the military's worst coronavirus outbreak.

Army Capt. Douglas Linn Hickock, a member of the New Jersey National Guard, died March 28. Hickock, a 57-year-old physician assistant, was preparing to activate as part of the pandemic response just before he was hospitalized with the virus and died one week later.

Kabul releases 900 Taliban prisoners

By J.P. LAWRENCE
AND PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — About 900 Taliban prisoners were set free from government prisons near Bagram Airfield and elsewhere in Afghanistan on Tuesday, a move that could further an embattled peace process, Afghan officials said.

The release came on the last day of a three-day cease-fire between the Taliban and the government to mark the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

The government is ready to extend the cease-fire, National Security Council spokesman Javid Faisal told reporters Tuesday, and the Taliban said it would consider doing so as well.

“If these developments, like the announcement of prisoner release continues, it is possible to move forward with decisions like extending the brief cease-fire and to move in a positive direction with some minor issues,” a senior Taliban offi-

cial told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

The released inmates had their biometric data recorded and signed a pledge not to return to the battlefield.

However, Maj. Gen. Noorhullah Kadiri, the military police commander at Bagram prison, one of the country’s largest detention facilities, said he was skeptical that all would keep the pledge.

“If they’re going to go back to the battlefield, then it’s up to them,” Kadiri said.

Bagram released roughly 600 prisoners Tuesday, more than any other facility, said Nasifullah Totakhail, a member of the Defense Ministry’s release committee. There are about 17,000 Taliban prisoners in government detention, Totakhail said.

President Ashraf Ghani ordered the release of 2,000 Taliban prisoners in a speech Sunday morning following the cease-fire agreement.

“I announce that the Taliban prisoner release process will (move quickly) and serious steps will be taken,” Ghani said, while

also calling on the militant group to release its government and military captives.

The cease-fire halted rising violence in the country, with both the Taliban and the government launching offensives.

Prisoner exchanges between the Taliban and the Afghan government were a condition of starting intra-Afghan talks laid out in a deal signed between the U.S. and the Taliban on Feb. 29.

Disagreements over the exchanges, along with political infighting in Kabul and increased attacks by the Taliban, have strained the agreement in the months following the signing.

The deal called for up to 5,000 militants and up to 1,000 government personnel to walk free.

Before this week, the Afghan government had released about 1,000 Taliban prisoners, compared to about 250 set free by militants, Ghani’s office said.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Report: Counter Russia’s Black Sea moves

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — The U.S.-led NATO alliance is paying too little attention to the threat posed by Russia in the Black Sea, which Moscow sees as a launchpad into the wider region, said a report co-authored by the former head of U.S. Army Europe.

“What was once a Russian naval backwater is now the centerpiece of Moscow’s power projection into the Mediterranean ... It is evidently more willing to use force in the Black Sea region than anywhere else along the Eastern Flank,” retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges said in the report released Tuesday by the Center for European Policy Analysis.

Titled “One Flank, One Threat, One Presence: A Strategy for NATO’s Eastern Flank,” the report, co-authored by Hodges and security analyst Janusz Bugajski, argues that NATO has focused on building

up in the Baltics with multinational battlegroups and other measures, and overlooked the Black Sea region.

It recommends changes that would put the Black Sea “in the middle of the geostrategic map.”

NATO’s limited, “tailored” presence in Romania, for instance, should be upgraded to an Enhanced Forward Presence, similar to what allies have in the Baltic states and Poland, the report said.

Romania should be the “center of gravity” of NATO’s regional deterrence strategy and be reinforced with command and control capabilities, and improved rail and road infrastructure, it said.

Unmanned maritime systems and ground-based systems could be based in Romania, including anti-ship missiles, drones and rotary wing attack aircraft, and used to bolster NATO defenses in the western Black Sea, the report said.

It also calls for a Black Sea Maritime Policing Mission to be established for a year-round NATO naval presence.

The current “tiered approach to deterrence capabilities created a degree of incoherence along the Eastern Flank, in effect yielding the initiative in the Black Sea region to the Kremlin, putting strains on the cohesion of the Alliance, and exposing NATO to continued aggressive probing from Russia,” it said.

The report also makes the case for upgrades in Poland and the Baltics, and suggests that NATO should adjust how it measures defense spending among allies. The Black Sea was, however, the main focus of the report.

Hodges, who led USAREUR until 2018, has argued that the region holds greater strategic and economic importance for Moscow than the Baltic region.

Hodges was a lead architect of the Army’s expanded mis-

sion in Europe following Russian aggression in Ukraine, where it sent troops in 2014 to help separatists in the east. The push resulted in the annexation by Russia of the Crimean Peninsula.

Elsewhere in the region, Russia fought a brief war in 2008 with the Republic of Georgia and continues to have troops in that country’s breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. And in 2018, Russia opened fire on Ukrainian vessels in the Black Sea’s Kerch Strait and seized Ukrainian sailors.

“Russia’s subversion, probing, and interventions along the Eastern Flank could develop into several outright conflicts along NATO’s Eastern Flank. It is for this reason that the Alliance needs to make preparations — whether to deter escalation, defuse an armed conflict, or defend against outright military confrontation,” the report stated.

AFRICOM: Moscow aiding Libyan warlord with planes

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Russia has flown warplanes to Libya in a move aimed at propping up a warlord and possibly gaining a permanent foothold in the war-torn country, the U.S. military said Tuesday.

A proxy war is playing out in Libya between numerous nations, including Russia, which has mercenaries on the ground lending support to the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Hifter.

“The Russian fighter aircraft arrived in Libya, from an airbase in Russia, after transiting Syria where it is assessed they were repainted to camouflage their Russian origin,” U.S. Africa Command said Tuesday in a statement.

The aircraft are likely to provide close air support and offensive strikes for the Wagner Group — Russian mercenaries supporting Hifter’s forces, AFRICOM said.

At least 14 Russian aircraft were sent to Libya, including MiG-29 Fulcrums and Su-35

Flankers, AFRICOM said in response to a Stars and Stripes query.

The deployment also raises other concerns for U.S. military leaders, who said that Russia is pursuing goals unrelated to “what is best for the Libyan people.”

“If Russia seizes basing on Libya’s coast, the next logical step is they deploy permanent long-range anti-access area denial (A2AD) capabilities,” said Gen. Jeff Harrigian, commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa, in the statement. “If that day comes, it will create very real security concerns on Europe’s southern flank.”

Libya has been in chaos since a 2011 NATO-led intervention that led to the overthrow of strongman Moammar Gadhafi. Militias have fought for control while the internationally recognized government in Tripoli has struggled to assert itself. While the U.S. and other countries such as Turkey back the Government of National Accord, Moscow has sided with Hifter.

Okinawa Marines bid farewell to Combat Logistics Regiment 35

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Marines on Okinawa deactivated the first of three combat logistics regiments slated for elimination in a move meant to streamline the force.

The colors for Combat Logistics Regiment 35 were cased for the final time Friday at Camp Kinser in front of an audience of just three, due to the coronavirus, said a Marine Corps statement released Sunday.

Combat Logistics Regiment 35, 3rd Marine Logistics Group, had served as the headquarters for 3rd Maintenance Battalion and 3rd Supply Battalion for 14 years. Those battalions will now serve III Marine Expeditionary Force independently, under the 3rd Marine Logistics Group staff structure.

The move is expected to afford more flexibility in “organizing, training and equipping” the force, the statement said.

“While it may seem counterintuitive, deactivation of regimental headquarters can be seen as a small part of the larger, institutional effort to align to the Commandant’s Planning Guidance,” Combat Logistics Regiment 35 commander Col. Joon Um said in the statement. “This is part of the Marine Corps getting lighter, faster and more lethal.”

The Okinawa-based logistics regiment will be joined in retirement later this year by Combat Logistics Regiment 15 at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Combat Logistics Regiment 25 at Camp Lejeune, N.C., the statement said.

UN probe: Koreas violated armistice in gunfire exchange

By KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The United Nations Command on Tuesday accused both Koreas of violating the 1953 armistice agreement during an exchange of gunfire across the border earlier this month, but investigators failed to determine if the North had fired on purpose.

North Korean soldiers fired four rounds of 14.5 mm small arms from a guard post on their side of the Demilitarized Zone upon the U.N. Command guard post 250 at 7:41 a.m. on May 3, the U.N. Command said in a press release.

“However, the investigation was unable to definitively determine if the four rounds were fired intentionally or by mistake,” the command said, adding that North Korea has acknowledged receiving a request for information about the incident but has not offered a formal response.

South Korean guards responded 32 minutes later with two volleys of gunfire and two broadcast warnings toward the North, it said.

South Korea’s military insisted that its troops followed proper procedures and expressed regret that the UNC released the results without “a practical investigation of the North Korean gunfire.”

“Our military unit on the ground took appropriate measures according to our response manual,” the defense ministry said in a statement.

It also promised to continue to work to implement an inter-Korean military agreement signed in September 2018 and to take other measures aimed at easing tensions between the

two nations.

The U.N. Command, which is led by Gen. Robert Abrams, who also commands U.S. Forces Korea and is in charge of enforcing the armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War in lieu of a peace treaty, launched a probe shortly after the incident.

The DMZ, about 155 miles long and 2.5 miles wide, has often been a flashpoint between the two Koreas, and past violence has pushed the two countries to the brink of conflict.

Tens of thousands of combat troops are on both sides of the border, which is lined with barbed wire fences and filled with land mines.

Investigators determined that both sides “committed armistice agreement violations with unauthorized small arms fire across the Military Demarcation Line,” said Army Col. Lee Peters, a spokesman for the U.N. Command.

The command said that it had the full cooperation of the South Korean military and will conduct follow-up discussions with both sides “to encourage an implementation of measures” to prevent further armistice violations.

The findings provided new details but shed little light on how the exchange of gunfire began.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and South Korean military officials have said that they believe that North Korean troops fired accidentally because it was foggy and reportedly the time for a shift change during which weapons are tested. Farming on the northern side of the border was said to have continued uninterrupted during the incident.

Congress mulls next moves on virus relief

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress is at a crossroads in the coronavirus crisis, wrestling over whether to “go big,” as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi wants for the next relief bill, or hit “pause,” as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell insists.

It’s a defining moment for the political parties heading toward the election and one that will affect the livelihoods of countless Americans suddenly dependent on the federal government. Billions of dollars in state aid, jobless benefits and health resources are at stake. As questions mount over Washington’s proper role, it’s testing the ability of President Donald Trump and Congress to do the right thing.

“These are the eternal debates in American history,” said Richard Sylla, a professor emeritus of economic and financial history at New York University.

“It’s a bit like what Alexander Hamilton was facing in 1790,” he said, describing the plan to have the new federal government assume the Revolutionary War debts of the states, despite protests of a bailout. It was, he said, as Hamilton framed it, “the price of liberty.”

As negotiations develop on Capitol Hill, the coronavirus response offers Congress an opportunity to shape the country’s post-pandemic future, but also carries the risk of repeating mistakes of past crises, including the 2008-09 recession, that history does not easily forget.

Trump and McConnell huddled late last week on next steps after rejecting Pelosi’s plan. The Democratic speaker set the table with passage of the sweeping \$3 trillion coronavirus relief bill, which includes \$1 trillion to shore up states and cities to avert municipal layoffs, \$1,200 stipends to Americans and other aid.

“We could have done bigger,” Pelosi told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

With more than 38 million unemployment claims, the Republican response centers on kick-starting the economy to reduce the need for more federal intervention.

Republican priorities are to wean Americans off unemployment benefits to nudge people back to work and provide liability protections for businesses that reopen.

Republicans want to eliminate the \$600 weekly unemployment benefit boost, arguing that it “handcuffs” some employees with higher pay than they earn at their jobs. McConnell also wants to protect doctors, schools and others from COVID-19-related lawsuits — a “red line,” he said, for any deal.

“There’s a high likelihood we will do another rescue package,” McConnell said on Fox News. “We need to work smart here.”

WHO warns first wave of virus pandemic is not over

Associated Press

BANGKOK — As Brazil and India struggle with surging coronavirus cases, a top health expert is warning that the world is still smack in the middle of the pandemic, dampening hopes for a speedy global economic rebound and renewed international travel.

“Right now, we’re not in the second wave. We’re right in the middle of the first wave globally,” said Dr. Mike Ryan, the World Health Organization’s executive director.

“We’re still very much in a phase where the disease is actually on the way up,” Ryan told reporters, pointing to South America, South Asia and other areas where infections are still on the rise.

India saw a record single-day jump in new cases for the seventh straight day. It reported 6,535 new infections Tuesday, raising its total to 145,380, including 4,167 deaths.

The virus has taken hold in some of India’s poorest, most densely populated areas, underscoring the challenges that authorities face in curbing the spread of a virus for which a vaccine or cure isn’t yet in sight.

Most of India’s cases are concentrated in the western states of Maharashtra, home to the financial hub of Mumbai, and Gujarat. Infections have also climbed in the east as migrant workers stranded by lockdowns returned to their native villages from India’s largest cities.

Despite this, India allowed domestic flights to resume Monday following a two-

month hiatus, but at a fraction of normal traffic levels.

WHO poured cold water on Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro’s hopes of quickly reopening the economy, warning that authorities must first have enough testing in place to control the spread of the virus. Brazil has 375,000 coronavirus infections — second only to the 1.6 million cases in the U.S. — and has counted over 23,000 deaths but many fear Brazil’s true toll is much higher.

Ryan said Brazil’s “intense” transmission rates means it should keep some stay-at-home measures in place, regardless of the negative impacts on its economy.

In Europe, Russia reported a record daily spike Tuesday of 174 deaths, bringing the country’s confirmed death toll to 3,807. Russia’s coronavirus caseload surpassed 360,000 — the third highest in the world — with almost 9,000 new infections registered.

The country’s comparatively low mortality rate has raised questions among experts. Russian officials, however, vehemently deny manipulating any figures and attribute the low numbers to the effectiveness of the country’s lockdown measures.

The question of who can travel where and when remains a dilemma that officials still have yet to solve.

Spain’s foreign minister said Tuesday that European Union members should commonly agree to open borders and jointly determine which non-EU countries are designated as safe for travel. Arancha Gonzalez Laya told Cadena SER radio that

resuming cross-border travel should be decided collectively even if countries in the 27-nation bloc are phasing out lockdowns at different dates.

“We have to start working with our European partners to retake the freedom of movement in European territories,” she said.

Indonesia said it will deploy 340,000 security forces in 25 cities to enforce health protocols as the world’s fourth most populous nation prepares to reopen shopping centers and other businesses in the capital Jakarta on June 4.

Estonia, a country known for its high-tech approach, has started a trial using a cellphone and online app that shares a person’s health data. The app dubbed ImmunityPass generates a temporary QR-code that can be shared with others to demonstrate that someone is virus free.

On the medical front, WHO said it will temporarily drop hydroxychloroquine — the malaria drug U.S. President Donald Trump said he took — from its global study into experimental COVID-19 treatments. The announcement came after a paper in the Lancet showed that people taking the drug were at higher risk of death and heart problems.

Still, several countries in Europe and North Africa are using chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19 patients.

Other treatments in the WHO study, including the experimental drug remdesivir and an HIV combination therapy, are still being pursued.

Traders cheer as NYSE reopens

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The trading floor of the New York Stock exchange reopened Tuesday for the first time in two months, and the state legislature was set to reconvene as the state relaxed more restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the coronavirus.

Traders cheered as Gov. Andrew Cuomo rang the opening bell of the Stock Exchange, which had been closed since March when the state shut down in the face of the virus. Under rules put in place to prevent a resurgence, traders will be required to wear masks and stay 6 feet apart. Anyone entering the Exchange will be asked to avoid public transportation.

The legislature will be in session Tuesday for the first time since the coronavirus forced lawmakers home after they passed the state budget in April. A few members of the state Senate and Assembly were expected to travel to Albany to debate and vote on bills from their offices or the chambers while most lawmakers will participate from home through video and teleconference.

Alabama

MONTGOMERY — Some Alabama residents spent the holiday weekend struggling to claim their weekly unemployment benefits.

The Alabama Department of Labor told local news outlets that about 53,000 people were blocked from filing the required weekly report telling the state government they still don't have a job. Only then will another week's worth of unemployment benefits be issued.

The state Labor Department said that technical glitches led those who tried to file their weekly certification to have their account suspended.

Spokesperson Tara Hutchison told WSFA-TV that claimants were not seeing errors Monday morning, and that suspensions had been lifted. A second message, however,

indicating that filings had been made also caused some confusion.

California

LOS ANGELES — Rabbi Shalom Rubanowitz looks forward to reopening his synagogue doors — if his congregation can balance the laws of God and California during the coronavirus pandemic.

On Monday, the state released a framework that will let counties allow in-person worship services. They include limiting worshippers to 100 or less, taking everyone's temperature, limiting singing and group recitations and not sharing prayer books or other items.

The Orthodox congregation of Shul on the Beach in Los Angeles County's Venice Beach will follow the guidelines, consulting with rabbinical authorities who place a high importance on preservation of life, Rubanowitz said.

Individual counties will decide whether to allow the reopening of in-person services for churches, mosques, synagogues and other religious institutions. In-person religious services are relegated to phase three, which Newsom had said could be weeks away.

Montana

HELENA — No new cases of the coronavirus were reported in Montana on Monday for the fifth straight day, keeping the total number of cases at 479.

There were 22 people with active cases of COVID-19, including three people who were in the hospital, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services said. Sixteen people with COVID-19 have died in the state.

An outbreak in western Montana has been tied to an exclusive golf and country club developed by financial executive Charles Schwab. Eight people who tested positive for COVID-19 in Ravalli County are employees of the club near Hamilton, Stock Farm Club

General Manager Steve Buck said.

North Dakota

BISMARCK — Health officials said Monday that another person has died from the coronavirus in North Dakota, and 40 additional people have tested positive for COVID-19.

The latest victim was a woman in her 80s with underlying health conditions. She was from Cass County, as were 37 of the people who most recently tested positive.

A total of 54 people have died from the virus in North Dakota, where total positive cases have now reached 2,457. Health officials said that 154 people have been hospitalized since the outbreak began, with 41 currently being cared for at hospitals.

New Mexico

LAS VEGAS — Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham has blocked the reopening of a popular northern New Mexico drive-in movie theater despite city officials believing they had the OK.

The governor's office halted a plan on May 14 to reopen the Fort Union Drive-In Movie Theater in Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Optic reported.

City leaders believed that they had the support of state leaders to open the theater and planned to show a double feature of "Trolls World Tour" and "Doolittle" on May 15.

But the governor's office called the San Miguel County Emergency Management Department the day before the scheduled reopening and told officials that they didn't have permission, Las Vegas Mayor Louie Trujillo said. The governor's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment Monday.

South Carolina

COLUMBIA — South Carolina's top education official wanted \$115 million for summer school programs to get some of the state's most vul-

nerable students back on track after missing at least 10 weeks of in-person classes because of the coronavirus.

But Accelerate SC, the state's special reopening committee, only recommended about 10% of that from the \$1.9 billion of COVID-19 relief the federal government is giving the state.

So state Education Superintendent Molly Spearman is cutting her ambitious plans while also planning to go above their heads to the governor and ultimately the General Assembly to see if they will set aside more money before voting on the final plan to spend the pandemic money next month.

The current funding is enough to provide one week of summer school to help special education students and younger elementary students struggling to read, education officials said.

Virginia

RICHMOND — The Virginia Department of Health has reported the second confirmed case in the state of a pediatric inflammatory illness associated with the coronavirus.

The department's website Monday showed a second case of Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children in the Fairfax Health District, which includes Fairfax County and the cities of Fairfax and Falls Church. No other details, including the age of the child, were provided.

Officials confirmed the first case in the district last week, saying at the time that the child was recovering at home.

While children have generally not experienced severe cases of COVID-19, health officials have warned recently of the new inflammatory illness related to the virus. The Centers for Disease Control issued an advisory about the syndrome May 14, warning of symptoms including fever, abdominal pain without another explanation, diarrhea, vomiting, swollen hands and feet, red or cracked lips, rash and bumpy tongue.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Official wants to revisit statues' removal

VA CHARLOTTESVILLE — A top official in the Virginia city where a white nationalist rally erupted in violence in 2017 has called for renewing discussions about removing two Confederate statues, one of which became the focus of the rally.

In an April email obtained by The Daily Progress, Charlottesville City Manager Tarron Richardson indicated that he wants to hold meetings with the City Council in June, after the council approves its budget for fiscal 2021, to discuss the removal of the statues of Confederate Gens. Robert E. Lee and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.

Richardson sent the email four days after Gov. Ralph Northam signed bills that give local officials the authority to remove, relocate or alter their Confederate monuments. The legislation takes effect on July 1.

Bear in tree moved, to be released elsewhere

PA ERIE — State game commission wardens in northwestern Pennsylvania tranquilized and removed a 127-pound bear from a neighborhood in the city of Erie over the weekend.

Erie police and game wardens were called to the east Erie neighborhood at about 2:30 p.m. Saturday after the animal was spotted in a tree in the backyard of a home.

A game warden fired a tranquilizer dart from the bucket of a fire department ladder truck that was backed into an adjacent yard near the tree. The bear, which was clinging to a branch about 25 feet in the air, dropped to the ground several minutes later.

Wardens said that the bear was uninjured by the fall and estimated it to be about 1½-years-old. They said that the bear would likely be taken to Forest County and released.

Man, 20, charged in nursing home assault

MI DETROIT — A 20-year-old Detroit nursing home patient was charged Sunday with beating his 75-year-old roommate in an assault that authorities said the younger man recorded on his cellphone and posted on social media.

Jaden T. Hayden of Ypsilanti was charged with two counts of assault, larceny and two counts of stealing a financial transaction device, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office said.

Hayden was sharing a room with Norman Bledsoe when authorities alleged that he set up a cellphone and recorded himself beating the older man. Hayden told nursing home staff who found Bledsoe bleeding on May 15 that Bledsoe had fallen out of bed, prosecutors said. Bledsoe had head injuries and was taken to a hospital for treatment.

Hayden posted video of the attack on social media, prosecutors said, and also stole Bledsoe's credit cards. He was arrested Thursday after the video was brought to the attention of police.

Over 2K need to return refund sent in error

LA BATON ROUGE — More than 2,100 Louisiana taxpayers have yet to return refund money they were sent as the result of a mistake.

WAFB-TV reported that nearly \$595,000 is involved. The Louisiana Legislative Auditor said that computer problems

led to 66,780 individual income tax refunds totaling \$26.9 million being unintentionally refunded to taxpayers twice last year.

Most of the money was recovered. People who received the extra money and haven't yet returned it are being issued bills by the state revenue department, WAFB reported. The state said that collections efforts against those who don't pay the bills will not include removing the owed amount from any COVID-19 economic impact payments.

Police arrest man who shot at paramedics

GA MONTEZUMA — A Georgia man could face criminal charges for shooting at paramedics. Jimmy Spradley Jr. was arrested Friday afternoon, Montezuma Police Chief Eric Finch told WMAZ-TV.

Macon County paramedics and first responders were approaching a home when someone shot a gun at them, Finch said. Police officers responded and special response team members entered the home, arresting Spradley.

Spradley has a history of mental illness and was taken to a Macon hospital, the police chief said.

Man arrested after toddler wanders

FL FLOROSA — A Florida man has been arrested after a driver spotted a runaway toddler in diapers on a highway near midnight.

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office said that the man had put the 2-year-old child in bed and was checking emails, but didn't realize the toddler had escaped.

A driver found the child on Highway 98 in Florosa in the

Florida Panhandle and called authorities. A deputy familiar with the neighborhood went to a nearby home where he knew there were young children and noticed a garage door and interior door open.

The sheriff's office said in a Sunday news release that 43-year old Micah Adkins is facing a child neglect charge. Adkins said that it was the second time the toddler had escaped in the past three days, the release said. The first time he also left the garage door open, and the child walked to a nearby car wash.

Lost climber rescued from Mount Hood

OR PORTLAND — Searchers rescued a lost climber on Mount Hood by tracking his phone, officials say.

The crew found Nicolas David Larson, 31, of Sunriver, early Saturday morning. He was taken to a nearby hospital for treatment of hypothermia.

Larson was reported missing Friday evening by a friend who had received text messages from him, Sgt. Marcus Mendoza with the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office said. The lost climber called 911 himself a short time later. Larson said that he had reached the summit of Mount Hood on Friday, but became lost in whiteout conditions. He had protein bars but no water, and told dispatchers that his cellphone battery was about to run out.

Searchers looked through the night and found Larson at about 6,200 feet on the west side of Mount Hood around 2 a.m. About 30 people participated in the rescue, including crews from Portland Mountain Rescue and the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Jets' Gore defying age after 15 seasons

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Frank Gore just keeps running — defying logic and Father Time with each hard-fought yard.

At 37 years old, the star running back is considered ancient in football terms, playing a position at which most guys his age and with his workload would have been long retired.

But Gore is preparing for his 16th NFL season, this one with the New York Jets. He's No. 3 on the league's career rushing list with 15,347 yards, behind only Emmitt Smith and Walter Payton. And, he doesn't believe he's anywhere near finished.

"I really don't think about age," Gore said during a Zoom call Thursday. "It's the way I train. I love to stay around younger guys at the position, just to look at myself, to be honest with myself."

Gore has made a career of being a smart, tough runner whose workout regimen impresses all who have coached

or played with him. During his 10 years in San Francisco, three in Indianapolis and then one-year stints in Miami and Buffalo, Gore has challenged himself to stay at a high level. And he has been productive at every stop.

With the Jets, he'll likely be behind Le'Veon Bell in a backfield that will also include rookie La'Mical Perine. For a bell-cow back who has led his team in carries every season, that lessened workload will be a bit of a change.

"I'm cool," Gore insisted. "I'm happy to even be playing this game at my age. I'm happy that this organization gave me an opportunity. But I'm just going to come in here, come work and help all the young guys and show those young guys I still can play."

Gore signed a one-year deal worth \$1.05 million with the Jets two weeks ago, reuniting with coach Adam Gase — something the running back said was a major factor in him coming to

New York. The two first worked together when Gase was an offensive assistant with the 49ers in 2008. They developed a bond and Gase told Gore if he ever got a head coaching job, he'd love for Gore to play for him.

In 2018, Gase made it happen with the Dolphins. Two years later, they are back together.

"I was 35 and once you touch that 30-mark, guys don't really want to give you an opportunity, give you a chance," Gore said. "He stuck by his word and brought me to Miami. We won some games. ... He's very smart, he's real, and he's a man of his word."

The opportunity to play with quarterback Sam Darnold — "I'm very excited" — on a team with a defense that includes safety Jamal Adams — "I think he's a top safety in this league. I love the way he comes to play every down, every game" — also played roles in Gore choosing the Jets.

Gore has yet to speak with Bell since signing with New

York, but insists the two will be fine working in the same backfield. They have known each other for several years, and train in the same area in Florida. Gore also sought out Bell last season after the regular-season finale to get his jersey to frame for his wall.

"I respect his game and I respect the way he prepares himself to get ready for the season," Gore said. "I've been around a bunch of talented running backs my whole career, even in college, the NFL. I'm going to do whatever it takes to help him, help the other guys and also help the team be successful on Sundays."

Gore is on his third AFC East team in as many seasons; New England's the only squad for which he hasn't played. The Patriots have won 11 straight division titles, but many think that streak could end without Tom Brady at quarterback.

Count Gore among them.

"Brady's gone, and it's wide-open," he said.

NHL hopes to have players in facilities next month

Associated Press

TORONTO — The NHL hopes to have players back in team facilities soon — with plenty of precautions.

The league, which paused its season on March 12 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, released a memo Monday saying it is targeting early next month as the start date for Phase 2 of its return-to-play protocol, including the opening of practice rinks and allowing small, voluntary group workouts on and off the ice.

"It has not yet been determined when precisely Phase 2 will start or how long it may last," the memo said. "We are continuing to monitor developments in each of the club's markets, and may adjust the overall timing if appropriate, following discussion with all relevant parties."

The NHL, which has worked

closely with the NHL Players' Association on the phased approach, said that while it views the protocol as "very comprehensive ... (it) cannot mitigate all risk."

"A range of clinical scenarios exist, from very mild to fatal outcome," the 22-page memo continued. "COVID-19 generally affects older age groups and those with previously existing medical conditions, more so than younger, and otherwise healthy, individuals."

"We recognize that players and personnel have family and household members who may fall into these vulnerable categories."

If the Phase 2 plan gets the green light, on-ice sessions will be noncontact and involve up to six players, who will be expected to maintain physical distancing at all times. Players will be required to wear masks when entering and exiting fa-

cilities, and when not able to physically distance.

"Players are not required to wear face coverings when they are exercising or on the ice," the memo said.

Teams are not allowed to require a player to return to a club's home city to complete any necessary quarantine measures before the workouts begin. Coaches and management will be allowed to watch, but not participate in, the informal skates.

The final two phases of the return-to-play protocol—training camps followed by a resumption of game action—were not mentioned in the memo. Phase 1, which continues after a number of extensions, saw players advised to self-quarantine after the coronavirus paused most of the sports world some 10 weeks ago.

The NHL/NHLPA Return to Play Committee has been hash-

ing out details of what the game will look like if it's allowed to return this summer. The union's executive board approved further negotiations on a 24-team format Friday.

The Phase 2 memo made public Monday also states players and staff will be administered COVID-19 nasal swab tests two days before training begins and will be tested twice a week afterward. They must perform daily self-administered temperature and symptom checks at home before heading to their team's facility.

Clubs must also administer "a separate temperature and symptom check at the entrance of the club facility."

Players who live in NHL markets other than where they play will be permitted to use local facilities, pending availability, meaning they won't have to travel back to their team's home cities for Phase 2.

Kyle Busch uses last-lap pass to win

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — Kyle Busch normally celebrates his victories by climbing on top of his race car and bowing to the crowd.

But with no fans in attendance at Charlotte Motor Speedway on Monday night due to the coronavirus pandemic, Busch passed on the tradition after driving past Austin Cindric on the final lap of overtime to claim his 97th career Xfinity Series win.

“It kinda felt a little odd,” Busch said. “I guess I could have bowed to the camera.”

After a crash involving several cars sent the race into overtime, Cindric had a great restart in overtime and overtook Busch for the lead starting from the inside lane. But Busch battled back, driving by Cindric on the backstretch of the final lap and holding on to win his 18th overall race at CMS.

“I thought choosing the outside was the right way but obviously it wasn’t. I don’t know,”

Busch said. “Those guys put up a whale of a fight tonight on restarts. I guess I’m not good at it anymore.”

Cindric thought he had Busch beat.

“To almost beat one of the best in the business on worse tires, I never lifted, I never lifted until I knew I was done,” Cindric said. “I wanted to win so bad.”

Busch has won 210 races overall across NASCAR’s top three series, the most of any driver.

Daniel Hemric edged Cindric for second. Cindric finished third, followed by Ross Chastain and Justin Allgaier.

Busch appeared in control for most of the race, winning the first two stages, but was assessed a speeding penalty on pit row with 38 laps to go, dropping him to 10th place.

But Busch was far from done.

He battled back through the field with the help of a series of strong restarts on the six cau-

tions over the final 45 laps.

Busch recaptured the lead with 10 laps to go, but nearly gave it all away in overtime.

“I was surprised (Cindric) got as good of a launch as he did,” Busch said. “On that restart he passed me and I was like, ‘Oh man I don’t know if I can get back to him,’” Busch said. But Cindric got a little loose between turns one and two and Busch was able to make a pass.

Busch drove a No. 54 Toyota sponsored by the Appalachian State University class of 2020.

“Hopefully this will lift your spirits, we won one for you,” Busch said to the App State students who didn’t get to have a traditional graduation ceremony due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Busch is in the midst of running all seven races in 11 days at Darlington and Charlotte since NASCAR returned to action after being sidelined for two months because of the coronavirus.

It was a tough night for Dar-

lington winner Chase Briscoe, who finished 20th.

Briscoe, who was looking for his third Xfinity Series win of the season, drew penalties for an uncontrolled tire and speeding on pit road and then sustained damage to his car after hitting the wall with 45 laps to go when Timmy Hill’s engine blew up. Things went from bad to worse when he suffered damage to the right front of his car with 28 laps to go.

Jeffrey Earnhardt pulled out of his pits too early and wound up turning a lap with a jack wedged under his car.

It was the second of four races in four days at the 1½-mile track at Charlotte.

Brad Keselowski won the Coca-Cola 600 on Sunday night in overtime after a late caution flag cost Chase Elliott an almost certain victory. The Truck Series returns to the track for the first time in more than three months on Tuesday night, followed by another Cup race on Wednesday.

HBCUs brace for economic hit of no fans in stands

Associated Press

In the 100 years since the Southwestern Athletic Conference was formed, the conference home for some of the nation’s most storied historically black colleges and universities has always found a way to do more with less.

So far, schools in the SWAC have avoided the salary cuts, furloughs and elimination of sports that institutions elsewhere have resorted to as the coronavirus shut down sports.

As the days tick by with no clear answer for what a football season might look like this year, SWAC Commissioner Charles McClelland is certain of one thing.

“If we don’t have fans in the stands, from a revenue perspective it’s going to be extremely difficult for us to have a football season,” he said.

Teams in the SWAC as well

as many other HBCUs across the country play in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS). Schools at this level earn some money from television contracts, but nothing like the multimillion-dollar deals for the Power Five.

In the SWAC, the main source of revenue from football comes from putting fans in the stands and there are no substitutes for that at schools that often have limited resources. The conference has led the FCS in average home attendance in 42 of the past 43 years at events where fans are entertained not only by the game, but the showmanship of their marching bands.

This fall, packing fans into stadiums at the 10 SWAC schools in five states from Texas to Alabama just might not be an option even if campuses are open.

McClelland said no decision has been made on the possibil-

ity of playing without fans.

“But I can tell you (in) the Southwestern Athletic Conference, playing without fans would be a huge detriment to our overall business model, something we’d have to look at very significantly,” he said. “Because if we don’t have fans in the stands, it’s going to be difficult for us to pay the bills to put on our program.”

There are 107 HBCUs scattered across the country, and 21 of them play Division I sports, fielding teams in as few as 14 to as many as 18 sports each. Almost 6,000 students participate in sports at those institutions and thousands more play at the smaller HBCUs around the nation.

Prairie View A&M, which is located about 50 miles from Houston, led all HBCUs in sports revenue in 2018 by generating \$18.6 million, according to the Knight Commission

on Intercollegiate Athletics. But that revenue ranks 149th among all college sports teams.

To put it in perspective, the 21 Division I HBCUs generated about \$214 million in revenue in 2018, while the University of Texas out-earned those schools alone, leading the nation in sports revenue with more than \$219 million that year.

Another concern for the FCS conferences: If football returns but nonconference games are canceled, smaller schools could lose a fortune. Many of these schools earn significant amounts of money to line up against Bowl Subdivision schools early in the season.

The SWAC has several such games on the schedule this year. Alcorn State, winner of the last two SWAC championships, is scheduled to open the season at Auburn on Sept. 5.