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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Philippines leader declares 'time to say goodbye' to US

Bloomberg

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said he wants to break away from the U.S. and shift toward China and Russia, his strongest comments yet signaling a split with his nation's biggest military ally.

"In this venue, I announce my separation from the U.S.," Duterte said in Beijing on Thursday after meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping. Duterte also said he might go to Russian President Vladimir Putin and tell him "there's three of us against the world."

The announcement came in front of a packed room of Filipino and Chinese business leaders. The tough-talking 71-year-old leader has repeatedly questioned his nation's alliance with the U.S. while touting the economic benefits of friendlier ties with Beijing.

Earlier, China announced a resumption of bilateral talks on disputed territory in the South China Sea, an issue that had previously pushed the Philippines closer to America.

Chinese Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenmin told reporters that the two leaders had agreed to return to a "track of dialogue" over the South China Sea in what is a "new stage of maritime cooperation."

"China has been a friend of the Philippines and the roots of our bonds are very deep and not easily severed," Duterte said in a speech at the Great Hall of the People after meeting Xi for 30 minutes. "Even as we arrived in Beijing close to winter, this is a springtime of our relationship," he said.

Duterte said he was mulling plans to require U.S. visitors to the Philippines to obtain a visa.

Officials from both countries signed 13 pacts on areas including trade, investment, tourism, narcotics and maritime cooperation at the summit meeting.

Pacts on transport infrastructure, financing from Export-Import Bank were among those forged as China committed to support infrastructure development in the Philippines.

Before his meeting with Xi, Duterte told hundreds of Filipinos in Beijing that "it's time to say goodbye" to the U.S.

"Foreign policy veers now towards" China, Duterte said on Wednesday night. "No more American interference. No more American exercises," he told a cheering crowd. "I will not go to America anymore" for assistance, he said. "We will just be insulted there."

IED blast in Iraq kills GI

BY TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A U.S. servicemember died Thursday after being wounded by an improvised explosive device in northern Iraq, according to a statement by Combined Joint Task Force Iraq.

The command did not identify the servicemember nor immediately provide any additional information about the death.

A massive Iraqi operation was launched earlier this week to drive the Islamic State group from the northern city of Mosul. More than 100 U.S. soldiers are embedded with Iraqi forces, and hundreds more are playing a support role in staging bases.

The troops in Iraq include advisers,

trainers, special operations forces and others stationed at Iraqi bases, working with the Iraqi forces. In addition to working with the Iraqis at the division headquarters level, some advisers are advising them at the brigade and battalion level, meaning that they are embedding those teams of advisers with smaller units, closer to the fight.

The death announcement comes a day after two Americans — one a U.S. servicemember — were killed in Afghanistan.

In that case, U.S. and Afghan officials said an Afghan wearing a military uniform attacked a group of foreigners at a base near Kabul. Three other Americans, a servicemember and two civilians, were wounded, officials said.

Information from The Associated Press and Tribune News Service were used in this report.

Clinton, Trump clash in 3rd debate

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Threatening a fundamental pillar of American democracy, Donald Trump refused to say Wednesday night that he will accept the results of next month's election if he loses to Hillary Clinton. The Democratic nominee declared Trump's resistance "horrifying."

Trump has spent the days leading up to the third and final presidential debate warning voters that the election will be "rigged." Asked whether he would accept the outcome if Clinton emerges victorious, he said, "I will tell you at the time. I'll keep you in suspense."

That contradicted pledges by his running mate, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, as well as his daughter, Ivanka.

Wednesday's contest quickly shifted from a calm, policy-focused faceoff into a bitter and deeply personal confrontation. Trump called Clinton a "nasty woman," while the Democrat panned him as "unfit" to be commander in chief.

Clinton, who began the debate with a lead in nearly all battleground states, forcefully accused Trump of favoring Russia's leader over American military and intelligence experts after the Re-

publican nominee pointedly refused to accept the U.S. government's assertion that Moscow has sought to meddle in the U.S. election.

She charged that Russian President Vladimir Putin was backing Trump because "he'd rather have a puppet as president of the United States."

Trump denied any relationship with Putin and said he would condemn any foreign interference in the election. But he notably declined to back the intelligence community's assessment that Russia was involved in the hacking of Democratic organizations. The Clinton campaign has said the FBI also is investigating Russia's involvement in the hacking of a top adviser's emails.

The 90-minute contest in Las Vegas came just under three weeks before Election Day and with early voting underway in more than 30 states.

The candidates clashed repeatedly over their drastically different visions for the nation's future. Trump backed Supreme Court justices who would overturn the landmark *Roe v. Wade* ruling, while Clinton vowed to appoint justices who would uphold the decision legalizing abortion.

Chinese, Russian aircraft spur rise in scrambles by Japan

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND CHIYOMI SUMIDA

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japan is increasingly scrambling jets to check foreign aircraft as China tests its neighbor and Russia increases its presence in the Pacific.

While statistics on Japan Air Self-Defense Force interceptions for June to October show no air-space intrusions, there was an 11 percent increase from 281 in the previous three months, including a 4 percent rise in responses to near-approaches by Chinese fighters and a 30 percent increase in responses to Russian bombers.

The 594 sorties for April to October was a 73 percent increase from 343 in the same period last year. The 2016 figure included 407 sorties in response to Chinese fighters, an increase of 176 from the same period last year, which had been the highest number since 2001.

There also were 180 sorties in response to Russian bombers

in April-October, an increase of 72 from a year earlier.

Both the Defense Ministry and the JASDF declined to comment on the figures, although officials repeatedly have criticized Chinese expansion in the region. They also declined to comment on how Japan's airspace is set up, as it is not uniform surrounding Japanese territory.

Included in the statistics were sorties last month to intercept eight Chinese military aircraft flying between Okinawa's main island and Miyako Island.

Japanese officials spoke out against China's comments last month that it would continue to patrol an Air Defense Identification Zone that includes portions of the East China Sea's high seas and airspace over the resource-rich Senkaku island chain, claimed by both Japan and China.

There also have been 30 Chinese incursions at sea so far this year.

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Marine helo hits power line, is force to land

HONOLULU — The Marine Corps says a helicopter hit a power line in Hawaii, forcing it to land on Oahu's North Shore.

A spokesman for Marine Corps Base Hawaii said Wednesday that four crew members were on board when the incident happened, and no one was hurt.

Capt. Timothy Irish said the UH-1Y helicopter was on a regularly scheduled flight in a training area when it struck the power line Tuesday night. Pilots executed a precautionary emergency landing just over a mile south of Sunset

Beach onto private property, Irish said.

The helicopter is still where it landed undergoing an initial damage assessment, Irish said. It won't be flown back to its base in Kaneohe Bay until that assessment is done in order to ensure the safety of the Marines and the community.

Honolulu police are keeping the helicopter secure, Irish said.

The cause of the incident is being investigated.

The UH-1Y helicopter has the capacity to carry 12 Marines, including a pilot, co-pilot, crew chief, gunner and eight combat-equipped troops.

From The Associated Press

US joins allies in exercise aimed at weapons shipments

BY ERIK SLAVIN

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The United States, Japan and South Korea will practice detecting and stopping ships carrying weapons of mass destruction during a sea exercise this weekend.

The trilateral exercise comes in light of North Korea's continued work on its nuclear weapons and missile program, South Korean defense officials told reporters in Seoul on Thursday.

The maritime interdiction operation will be held Saturday and Sunday in international waters south of South Korea's Jeju Island, Yonhap News reported.

The sea services also will conduct search-and-rescue exercises aimed at rescuing personnel on disabled ships, the report said.

The Navy is sending the Yokosuka-based destroyer USS McCampbell, the replenishment oiler USNS Tippecanoe, a patrol aircraft and a helicopter, according to Yonhap.

Japan is sending the destroyer Ariake and multiple helicopters, while the destroyer Yulgok YiYi will represent South Korea, according to the report.

Officials at the 7th Fleet in Japan on Thursday referred all questions on the exercise to the Defense Department in Washington, where no one was immediately available for comment.

Although relations have been strained between South Korea and Japan in recent years, the U.S. and its two northeast Asia

The trilateral exercise comes in light of North Korea's continued work on its nuclear weapons and missile programs, South Korean defense officials said.

allies have agreed to share intelligence regarding North Korea.

On Oct. 14, senior military officials from Japan and South Korea met with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Joseph Dunford and regional commanders at the Pentagon.

They called on North Korea to "refrain from irresponsible provocations that aggravate regional tensions, and to instead focus on fulfilling its international obligations and commitments," according to a Pentagon statement.

Two days later, U.S. officials said they detected what they suspected was a failed Musudan intermediate-range rocket launch near Kusong, North Korea.

The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff called the launch an "illegal act of provocation" in a statement Sunday. United Nations Security Council resolutions bar North Korea from continuing work on its nuclear program.

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Ford's arresting system passes key test

(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

A critical system on the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford that has symbolized the ship's struggles has taken "a big step forward," the Navy has reported.

The advanced arresting gear, designed to safely land aircraft on the flight deck, recently recovered a "fly-in" of an F/A-18E Super Hornet at a land-based site in New Jersey.

Prior to that, the Navy had trapped more than 200 aircraft in a "roll-in" type of land-based test.

"This milestone test event demonstrates AAG's capability and signifies a big step forward in getting the system ready for

duty on board the Navy's newest aircraft carrier," said Capt. Stephen Tedford, program manager for aircraft launch and recovery equipment.

Built by General Atomics, the advanced arresting gear combines energy-absorbing water turbines and an induction motor to bring aircraft to a controlled stop.

It is currently installed on the Ford, which continues to undergo testing at Newport News Shipbuilding.

Naval Air Systems Command completed more than 1,300 "traps" using dead loads before switching to manned aircraft. The tests are being conducted at sites in Lakehurst, N.J.

The arresting system recognizes roll-in and fly-in landings as essentially the same, but the different approaches allow the Navy to test variable conditions the system will face, according to NAVAIR.

The Oct. 13 fly-in was deemed successful because it allowed the test team to gather data at 12 different points, said NAVAIR spokesman Michael Land.

Additional fly-in tests will not be needed, he said.

However, the Navy will continue to conduct roll-in tests with aircraft as well as dead-load tests.

Eventually, NAVAIR will issue what's called an aircraft recovery bulletin for the Super

Hornet.

It instructs the crew on how to use the advanced arresting gear for a specific type of aircraft.

NAVAIR plans to issue a limited aircraft recovery bulletin so the Ford can test the arresting gear with manned aircraft on its flight deck.

That timetable hasn't been announced.

Besides the new arresting gear, several key systems on Ford have proved troublesome. The ship is well behind its intended delivery of September 2015, and the Navy hasn't specified when the \$12.9 billion warship will join the fleet.

Report cites risks to US, Australia of 'Chinese wedge'

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

One of the top risks to the U.S.-Australia alliance is an emerging "Chinese wedge," in which Canberra would be forced to juggle its economic ties with China and its defense bond with America, potentially undermining its foreign policy, according to an Australian think tank's report.

"Against Complacency: Risks and Opportunities for the Australia-US Alliance," issued this week by the United States Centre in Sydney, advocates a dozen measures to strengthen the alliance.

Among the military-related recommendations are homeporting Navy vessels in Australia, expanding amphibious exercises, boosting cooperation in space and energizing Australia-Japan and U.S.-New Zealand ties.

Australia has been boosting its military strength and regional involvement and tightening its "web" of security ties with America and regional partners, says the report authored by Richard Fontaine, president of the Center for New American Security. Fontaine spent four months in Australia this year as the inaugural fel-

low for the Alliance 21 Fellowship, which was launched by the U.S. government.

The country shares America's commitment to a rules-based order that has benefited the two allies.

"The result is that Australia may today figure more prominently in the thinking of American policymakers than at any time since the Second World War," the report said. "The Australia-U.S. alliance is deeper, closer and healthier than ever before, and it is newly relevant to the region in which both countries discern their most vital future."

But that shouldn't lead to complacency, the report contends, particularly with China, the rising superpower in the Pacific.

Australia's economic ties to China are stark. A third of its exports go to China, a higher percentage than any other G-20 country, and China buys half of its exported iron ore from the country, the report said. Chinese investment and tourism in Australia are on the rise, which includes about 50,000 Chinese students studying there under the so-called "education export."

Complicating the relationship is China's routine "punish-

ment" of perceived offenses by trading partners through economic penalties.

The report considers three scenarios in which a China wedge might emerge in U.S.-Australia ties.

The first has Australia acting with American goals that would anger Beijing. That wedge is already materializing over China's claims to a vast swath of the South China Sea.

Canberra has called on China to abide by this year's decision from the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Netherlands, that determined China's claims of sovereignty in the sea were not valid.

A Chinese foreign policy spokesman said China was "shocked" by Australia's "wrong remarks." China's state-operated Global Times newspaper warned that if Australia joined the U.S. in freedom-of-navigation patrols in the sea, Australia "will be an ideal target for China to warn and strike."

China also has criticized Australia's warm reception to the Pentagon's interest in rotating new bombers and tankers through the country's air bases, which already have hosted nuclear-capable B-2 and B-52 bombers, the report said.

A second scenario could arise from policy or operational disagreements between America and Australia. For example, Washington was displeased with Canberra's decision to grant a Chinese company a 99-year lease to the port of Darwin, near the site through which U.S. Marines have been rotating.

Repercussions from a greater issue, such as the possibility of one day imposing economic sanctions against China for its actions in the South China Sea, could "split" the allies "in damaging ways," the report said.

A third possible wedge could arise if an actual armed conflict arose between America and China.

"In this, Australia would be required to choose sides," the report said. "If Washington at that point called on Australian support, whether maritime or even intelligence in nature, Canberra would face an unavoidable choice between the United States and China."

The next U.S. administration should build on the already firm foundation of the U.S.-Australia military alliance, the report recommended.

UK warships eye Russian vessels on way to Syria

Associated Press

LONDON — Britain has deployed warships to monitor a Russian aircraft carrier group and other vessels Thursday as they sailed through the North Sea and the English Channel reportedly en route to Syria's coast.

The frigate HMS Richmond escorted the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov and its task group in the Norwegian Sea north of the U.K. between Iceland and Norway. The destroyer HMS Duncan has sailed from Portsmouth to monitor the group as heads south toward the North Sea.

The Royal Navy regularly shadows ships, and is being supported in this instance by the Royal Air Force. But this Russian deployment is somewhat different, in that only a few countries have the capability to deploy such a force — an aircraft carrier and supporting warships.

"It's a clear and military signal that Russia is back on the international stage," said Peter Roberts, a senior research fellow for sea power and maritime studies at the Royal United Services Institute.

The ships are sailing in international waters, so NATO forces such as those of Norway, the Netherlands and Britain will simply watch them go past without challenge.

The Russian navy deployment will increase its firepower in Syria, where it has conducted an air campaign in support of President Bashar Assad's army for more than a year. It comes amid an offensive by Assad's troops on Aleppo, backed by Russian warplanes, that has caused international outrage.

British Prime Minister Theresa May has urged her European Union partners to unite in condemning Russia's role in Syria and to bring an end to what she called Moscow's "sickening atrocities" there.

Elite Iraqi unit joins Mosul fight

The Washington Post

SHEIKH AMIR, Iraq — Iraq's elite counterterrorism unit joined the battle to recapture Mosul from the Islamic State group for the first time on Thursday as Iraqi army forces and Kurdish soldiers attacked the militants' positions outside the city on several fronts.

Commanders said the counterterrorism force, which has received training and support from the United States, was besieging the town of Bartala, about 6 miles east of Mosul. Half a dozen Humvees from the unit were prepared to enter as Iraqi forces pounded Bartala with artillery.

The involvement of the counterterrorism unit came as Kurdish soldiers, known as peshmerga, opened a new front against the Islamic State group from the north of the city — the Islamic State group's last stronghold in Iraq.

Thursday marked the sec-

ond major wave since Iraq embarked on a large-scale operation to capture the city earlier this week. Over the last two days, the Kurdish and Iraqi forces have captured a string of villages south and east of Mosul, closing to within a dozen miles of the city.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced to Western diplomats in a video call to Paris that forces were moving "more quickly than planned" toward Mosul.

For the Islamic State group, losing Mosul would likely break the back of its self-proclaimed caliphate in Iraq.

Efforts to wrest Iraq's second-largest city from the militants' control have been stymied by concerns for the safety of more than 1 million civilians in the city, as well as squabbles over which of Iraq's fighting forces would participate.

Tens of thousands of soldiers are participating in the operation, which is backed by U.S.

air support. Islamic State fighters are vastly outnumbered but have countered the attacking force with suicide car bombs, improvised explosive devices and mortar fire.

The battle for Mosul is the most complex fight in the conflict to push Islamic State militants out of Iraq, involving not just Iraqi army forces, but also Sunni tribal units, Shiite militias and Kurdish forces.

Islamic State fighters overran the city in 2014, and it has since become the center of their operations in the country.

As Kurdish and Iraqi forces have pushed into the network of villages surrounding Mosul, they have found them heavily defended and booby-trapped.

Iraq's counterterrorism troops are among the most celebrated and effective units in the military. They led assaults on Ramadi and Fallujah earlier this year.

Residents of town outside Mosul rise up, kill Islamic State militants

Associated Press

AL-HUD, Iraq — The mutilated bodies of Islamic State group fighters were still strewn on the ground of this northern Iraqi town on Wednesday. One was burned. Another's face was flattened by abuse.

Iraqi troops on the march toward Mosul moved into al-Hud a day earlier and declared it liberated. But they found residents had risen up and killed many of the militants in the town themselves.

With the offensive to recapture Mosul in its third day, Iraqi forces advancing from the south and east are fighting to retake the towns and villages that dot the plains and line the Tigris River leading to the city. At times, they've met fierce resistance, with the militants

sending explosives-packed vehicles careening toward the troops' positions.

In al-Hud, a Sunni Arab town on the Tigris, residents saw their chance to get rid of them. On Monday, a man paraded through town with an Iraqi flag in a show of defiance, residents told The Associated Press. Islamic State fighters shot and killed him.

A group of residents gathered in a shop, news spread among the hundreds of people living in the town, and soon a crowd turned on the militants.

One resident, Ahmed Mohammed, said he and others shot a militant who was hiding by an outhouse behind a shop. "That didn't work. Then one of our guys came and threw a grenade on him from the top,"

he said.

Gasim Mohammed said his father was killed in the uprising against the militants. He kicked the head of one of the bodies. "This one smells like a dog," he said. "I hate them. Anyone I catch, I'll drink his blood. Even if it's a child."

It was not clear how many militants had been in the village or how many were killed. The AP saw at least five bodies.

On Wednesday, residents were celebrating. Children ran toward an Iraqi military convoy waving peace signs while others threw stones at the bodies of the dead Islamic State fighters. Residents fired celebratory rounds into the air, and cars long the main road still flew white flags of surrender.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man gets prison in death of a neighbor

NE OMAHA — A 56-year-old man has been imprisoned for killing his Omaha neighbor.

Robert Inman was sentenced Tuesday to eight to 10 years in prison. He'd pleaded no contest to a manslaughter charge in the death of John Hanes, 48. The two lived near each other at a mobile home park.

Prosecutors say Hanes took a meal of pot roast, potatoes and carrots to Inman's home early in the morning on Aug. 29, 2015, in hopes of partying. That pre-dawn disruption of their sleep angered Inman and his roommate. Prosecutors say a fight broke out, and Inman put Hanes in a chokehold to subdue him.

Inman says he called 911 after realizing Hanes wasn't breathing.

Democrats apologize for dumping sewage

GA LAWRENCEVILLE — The Democratic National Committee has apologized after one of its campaign buses was spotted dumping raw sewage along a road outside Atlanta.

News outlets report a Lawrenceville auto shop employee alerted police Tuesday morning after witnessing the sewage getting dumped into a storm drain. The bus, which bears the slogan "Forward Together" and features the likenesses of presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and running mate Tim Kaine, was in town for an early voting event.

The DNC apologized in a statement, calling it "an honest mistake." A representative later said the sewage container was full and the driver was concerned about the contents leaking.

Gwinnett County fire hazmat crews cleaned up the spill. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division is investigating.

University creates post to honor native author

ME ORONO — The University of Maine is creating the Stephen E. King Chair in Literature in honor of one of its most famous graduates.

The university is collecting applications from English professors to fill the position now. The appointment is set to begin August 2017 and is a five-year, renewable term.

The university says the position is tenured and it's designed to honor UMaine English department's "most celebrated graduate." The school says the position will have undergraduate education as a central focus.

King graduated from the university in 1970 with a degree in English. His first novel, "Carrie," was published four years later, and he has been one of America's most beloved horror and fantasy authors for four decades.

4 pigs escape, others killed as hauler crashes

AZ LITTLEFIELD — Four pigs escaped and several were killed when a tractor-trailer rig carrying 172 hogs crashed into a barrier wall along Interstate 15 in a gorge in northwestern Arizona.

The Monday afternoon accident closed southbound I-15 well into Monday evening, and the Arizona Department of Transportation said the left-hand lane remained closed Tuesday morning.

The Department of Public Safety said motorists helped corral pigs that got onto the highway in the Virgin River

Gorge between Mesquite, Nev., and St. George, Utah.

Youth center fined for head-banging injuries

MN ST. CLOUD — A St. Cloud youth center was fined after authorities say three teenagers suffered injuries from "daily and persistent" head-banging.

The Department of Human Services said the incidents at St. Cloud Children's Home took place in May and resulted in multiple concussions, facial injuries and head trauma. State investigators found that facility managers either instructed staff to allow the head-banging or to not intervene until there was "imminent" damage.

The teens suffered from a range of mental health conditions, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, intense anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

The center has been ordered to pay a \$1,000 fine and submit a plan on training staff on head and brain injuries. Trina Dietz, with center operator Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud, said the facility plans to appeal.

University condemns accusatory posters

CA SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco State University officials are condemning posters accusing a professor specializing in Palestinian studies of collaborating with terrorists.

The San Francisco Chronicle reported that the David Horowitz Freedom Center has taken credit for the posters. The posters single out Ethnic Studies associate professor Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi and carry the hashtag #JewHatred.

President Les Wong sent a campuswide email last week

saying the posters were bullying. They were quickly taken down.

Native American art licenses considered

NM SANTA FE — Santa Fe city officials are considering requiring businesses to secure licenses to sell authentic Native American art.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported that a proposal endorsed Monday by the City Council's Finance Committee would create a Native American Arts or Crafts District and require businesses selling such items to obtain a special business license.

The license would require business owners to clearly distinguish between authentic tribal art and other items, to display a sticker at their entrance stating that they are selling Native American arts or crafts and to have a display at the cash register informing customers of their rights.

Man pleads guilty in Social Security theft

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire man has pleaded guilty to taking more than \$101,000 in Social Security benefits erroneously paid to his dead mother.

Robert Duquette, of Hudson, pleaded guilty Monday to one count of theft of public money.

Court records say Duquette's mother was receiving widow's benefits from the Social Security Administration at the time of her death in October 2006. After she died, benefits were still deposited into a bank account that Duquette, 74, held jointly with his mother. Court papers say the benefits were suspended in April 2014.

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Cleveland heading to World Series

Associated Press

TORONTO — For the Cleveland Indians, the script was the same every game — hope for the best from whoever they started, then count on Andrew Miller and the bullpen to close it out.

That plan seemed especially dicey in Game 5 of the AL Championship Series, with lightly used Ryan Merritt on the mound.

But out of nowhere, the rookie delivered.

Merritt coolly kept the Indians ahead until reinforcements arrived, and Cleveland earned its first trip to the World Series since 1997 by blanking the Toronto Blue Jays 3-0 Wednesday.

The 24-year-old lefty defied expectations, shutting down the powerful Blue Jays before exiting in the fifth inning. Thanks to a most unlikely pitching performance, a most unexpected team won the ALCS 4-1.

Cleveland, which has never hosted a World Series opener, will play Game 1 at Progressive Field on Tuesday night against the Chicago Cubs or Los Angeles Dodgers.

Manager Terry Francona's team will try to augment what's already been a scintillating year in Cleveland after LeBron James and the Cavaliers earned the city's first major pro sports championship since 1964.

The Indians' title drought dates to 1948. In 1997, they let a one-run lead get away in the bottom of the ninth inning in Game 7

and lost to the Florida Marlins in the 11th.

"We always said if we could do it with this group it would be so special because this is as close to a family feel as you can get in a professional setting. So for that part of it, it is beyond feeling good," Francona said.

The Dodgers led the Cubs 2-1 going into Game 4 of the NLCS on Wednesday night. Cleveland didn't play either club this season.

Miller, acquired from the New York Yankees in a midseason trade, was selected the ALCS MVP as the Indians took their sixth pennant.

"I feel like I've said the word 'special' a million times in the last 20 or 30 minutes. But it's the truth. It's a blast to be a part of," Miller said.

With all of 11 major league innings under his belt — and only one start, on Sept. 30 — Merritt took the mound and looked just like a seasoned vet. The lefty retired the first 10 batters and allowed a mere two hits before being pulled after 4 1/3 innings.

"I know they were counting on me," Merritt said. "Before the game, they came and told me they had my back, everybody had my back, good or bad. So that takes some pressure off, and I just went out there and pitched and trusted my team."

Merritt got taps on his heart and hat from teammates when he left the mound. Then it was up to Cleveland's tireless relievers to hold a three-run lead against the wild-card

Blue Jays.

Miller again did most of the heavy lifting, going 2 2/3 innings before Cody Allen worked the ninth for a save. Winning pitcher Bryan Shaw tossed an inning before Miller came in.

Carlos Santana and Coco Crisp homered for the Indians.

With starting pitchers Carlos Carrasco, Danny Salazar and Trevor Bauer dealing with injuries, the Indians kept defying the odds.

Cleveland overtook defending World Series champion Kansas City and topped a \$196 million Detroit team to win the AL Central, then put an abrupt end to Big Papi's career, sweeping David Ortiz and the Boston Red Sox in the Division Series.

The Indians stayed on a roll in the ALCS, shutting down the banging Blue Jays. Cleveland won despite hitting .168 in the series, with slick-fielding shortstop Francisco Lindor leading the way in going 7 for 19.

Toronto lost in the ALCS for the second straight year.

"I'm sure there will be some disappointments and grumbling and complaining about how you fell short again, but that's not coming from me," manager John Gibbons said. "Because I know what these guys did, and I think it's a pretty good accomplishment. The key is we want to take that next step one of these days. Hopefully, it's next year."

Indians reliever Miller named ALCS MVP

Associated Press

TORONTO — MVP: Most Versatile Pitcher.

The humble workhorse in a wipeout bullpen, Andrew Miller was selected AL Championship Series MVP after his latest spotless outing sent the Cleveland Indians to their first pennant since 1997.

Miller tossed 2 2/3 innings in a 3-0 victory Wednesday over Toronto, capping a five-game series in which the lanky left-hander overpowered the dangerous Blue Jays.

He had one strikeout in Game 5 and finished the series with 14 — an ALCS record for a reliever. Miller gave up three hits in 7 2/3 shutout innings against

Toronto and earned a four-out save in Game 3.

"At this point of the year, you just find a way. That's all that matters. It's about winning," Miller said. "I would have given up 100 runs if we won 101-100. That's all that matters is we're going to the World Series, and that's a special experience and I can't wait."

After capturing their sixth pennant, thanks in large part to Miller, the Indians are four wins from their first championship since 1948.

Miller was acquired from the New York Yankees for a package of prospects in a July 31 trade, and Cleveland had an interesting idea of how to feature him. Rather than restrict-

ing him to a closer role or using him only in the eighth inning, the Indians have been flexible with Miller — especially in the postseason.

"It's so fun to be a part of this team," he said. "I really enjoyed my time with the Yankees. It's tough when you leave a comfort zone and a place that you like and people that you like. But I knew I was coming to a team that had won a lot and had expectations to win more."

Now, whenever the Indians have a lead in the middle innings, the 6-foot-7 lefty begins looming large in the bullpen — and Miller time is near.

With that nasty slider and a sizzling fastball he spots to both sides of the plate, he struck out

21 of 41 batters during the AL playoffs. He has allowed a mere six hits over 20 scoreless innings in his postseason career.

There are plenty of other important contributors in the Cleveland bullpen, particularly closer Cody Allen, who had 32 saves during the regular season and hasn't allowed a run in the postseason.

In fact, Indians relievers racked up 22 innings in the ALCS — the same amount as their starters.

But it's Miller who strikes the most fear in opposing hitters after he whiffed a whopping 14.9 per nine innings this season while going 10-1 with a 1.45 ERA and 12 saves.

Borrowed bat helps Cubs even NLCS

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — After striking out in his first two at-bats, Anthony Rizzo needed something to bust his slump. He found it in teammate Matt Szczur's bat.

Using the borrowed lumber, Rizzo homered and ended a postseason skid with three RBIs. The rest of the Chicago Cubs' hitters broke out equally as big in routing the Los Angeles Dodgers 10-2 on Wednesday to even the NL Championship Series at 2-all.

"I know Szczur's bat has a lot of hits in it," Rizzo said. "I've done it a few times this year, just switching up the bat, switching up the mindset."

Addison Russell's two-run homer highlighted a four-run fourth that stopped Chicago's 21-inning scoreless streak and ensured the NLCS will return to Wrigley Field for Game 6 on Saturday.

"It's definitely a sigh of relief to have a big night," Russell said.

Kenta Maeda is set to pitch for the Dodgers in Game 5 on Thursday against Jon Lester. Manager Dave Roberts said he will not start Clayton Kershaw on short rest after the Los Angeles ace threw a bullpen session Wednesday.

"It's not an elimination game," Roberts said.

Following two shutout losses, the Cubs rapped out 13 hits.

Rizzo used Szczur's bat on

Tuesday night and got a broken-bat single. Szczur, left off the NLCS roster, didn't mind. He wrapped another one for Game 4, figuring Rizzo might want to use the bat that is the same weight and size but a different model than his.

"I just saw him walking up with my bat, and I started laughing," Szczur said. "And then he hits a homer with it."

Rizzo and Russell had three hits each. Chicago's 3-4-5 hitters — a combined 2-for-32 in the first three games — busted out. Every Cubs starter got at least one hit except Kris Bryant, who walked twice and was hit by a pitch.

"It's contagious, just like the lack of it is contagious," Cubs manager Joe Maddon said. "When you start hitting, it's contagious, defense, this whole game really follows itself."

Los Angeles was limited to six hits and made four errors in a game that dragged on for 3 hours, 58 minutes.

"It happens, but we haven't had a game like that in a long time," Roberts said. "You've got to brush off and get ready for tomorrow."

Mike Montgomery won in relief of John Lackey, removed after consecutive walks opening the fifth. Four days shy of his 38th birthday, Lackey allowed two runs, three hits and three walks.

"I thought we put ourselves in a position to get to Lackey, but he escaped," Roberts said.

At 20 years, 68 days the youngest postseason starting pitcher in major league history, loser Julio Urias gave up four runs and four hits in 3²/₃ innings. He was the third consecutive left-hander to start for Los Angeles.

"I wish I had taken advantage of this outing," he said through a translator.

Chicago rattled off three straight hits to open the fourth, sparked by Ben Zobrist's lead-off bunt single to third.

"With the way that our bats were swinging it at the beginning of the game, we just had to do anything we could. That was my thought process," Zobrist said. "I felt like if he threw a strike, I could get one down in a good spot and was able to do it."

He took second on Javier Baez's single to left, and Willson Contreras followed with a single to nearly the same spot in shallow left, scoring Zobrist.

Baez moved to third and Contreras took second on left fielder Andrew Toles' errant throw to the plate that skidded all the way to the backstop.

Jason Heyward hit a run-scoring groundout, and Russell followed with his first extra-base hit since Sept. 30 and his first homer since Sept. 19. He jubilantly pumped an arm as he rounded the bases on his two-run drive, which put the Cubs ahead 4-0.

Rizzo homered off Pedro Baez leading off the fifth, snap-

ping his 0-for-11 skid in the series. Rizzo had entered 2-for-26 in the postseason.

Los Angeles closed to 5-2 in the fifth. With the bases loaded and one out, Justin Turner's likely double-play grounder caromed off Montgomery's glove and Russell, who scrambled on all fours at shortstop as the ball went into left-center field for a two-run single.

"If he just gets his glove out of the way, he gets out of the inning," Maddon said.

Chicago tacked on five runs in the sixth off relievers Ross Stripling and Luis Avilan. Dexter Fowler singled in the first run, Rizzo added two more on a bases-loaded single and Javier Baez hit a sacrifice fly, with a second run scoring on an error by center fielder Joc Pederson.

You're out on replay: Dodgers 1B Adrian Gonzalez was tagged out at home to end the second. A sliding Gonzalez stretched his left hand toward the tip of the plate as catcher Contreras applied the tag with his left hand near Gonzalez's upper left arm.

"We've got plenty of still frames that prove I was safe," Gonzalez said. "Usually they say the play stands, but they said there wasn't enough evidence, which means they know I was safe."

The Dodgers challenged Angel Hernandez's decision, and the video review let the call stand.

Ace Urias, Dodgers unravel in fourth inning

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Julio Urias cruised through three hitless innings to begin Game 4 of the NL Championship Series. The Los Angeles Dodgers' 20-year-old rookie starter seemed to be thriving under the spotlight.

Then the lights went out for Urias and the Dodgers.

In one miserable night at Chavez Ravine, they squandered a chance to take control of this series and lost their opportunity to win the pennant at home.

The Chicago Cubs ended their 21-inning scoreless streak with a four-run fourth

against Urias, and the youngest pitcher in big league history to start a postseason game took his first playoff loss in the Dodgers' 10-2 defeat Wednesday.

"I felt comfortable in that situation, but I just didn't get the results," Urias said through a translator.

Game 5 is Thursday, with Kenta Maeda scheduled to pitch against Cubs lefty Jon Lester. Manager Dave Roberts reiterated he won't start ace Clayton Kershaw on short rest, putting the three-time Cy Young Award winner in line for Game 6 on Saturday night at Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Urias was in fine shape until the fourth

inning, and so were the Dodgers' plans to keep a powerful Chicago lineup off the board. The left-hander from Mexico didn't pitch much down the stretch for the NL West champions, who gave him a postseason start with the hope he could realize his ample potential in October.

Urias walked two Cubs in the first three innings, but otherwise kept them mired in their slump — until Ben Zobrist led off the fourth with a clever bunt single. Urias acknowledged the bunt caught him off guard.

"That's baseball," he said. "Even if it's a bad hit, it's a hit. That's how they scored their runs."

Howard's play lifts Wings over Rangers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jimmy Howard's coach couldn't stop raving about the goaltender's performance.

"Jimmy stole the game," Detroit coach Jeff Blashill said of Howard, whose 32-save effort led the Red Wings to a 2-1 victory over the New York Rangers on Wednesday night. "Jimmy had one of the best performances I've seen out of any goalie at any level."

After beginning the season with two straight losses, the Red Wings have won consecutive games.

Thomas Vanek and Drew Miller scored for Detroit, which improved to 2-2-0, and it has Howard to thank for their latest win as New York had the better of play for wide stretches. The Rangers outshot Detroit 33-18 and Howard was forced into making highlight reel stops to keep the Red Wings in the game.

"We hit a hot goaltender," Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. "We had five or six break-aways we were unable to finish. Give him credit."

Jets 5, Maple Leafs 4 (OT): Rookie Patrik Laine completed a hat trick 2:40 into overtime, helping host Winnipeg overcome a four-goal deficit to beat Toronto.

The confident Finn got the better of his first head-to-head matchup against fellow rookie Auston Matthews, tying the game with 55 seconds left in the third before winning it in overtime. Laine went second overall in the 2016 draft behind Matthews, despite Laine's insistence he should have gone first.

Laine scored in overtime right after Matthews was stopped by goaltender Michael Hutchinson at the other end.

Laine has four goals on the season, tying Matthews and three others for the NHL lead.

Jets return to Smith at QB

Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J. — Fitz Magic fizzled, so it's Geno Smith's turn — again.

The New York Jets will start Smith at quarterback Sunday against Baltimore at MetLife Stadium, sending Ryan Fitzpatrick and his one-year, \$12 million contract to the sideline.

"I felt like it was time for a change," coach Todd Bowles said after practice Wednesday.

At the NFL fall meetings in Houston, Jets owner Woody Johnson said it was Bowles' call to go with Smith, with the Jets sinking at 1-5 and on a four-game losing streak. Bowles confirmed that it was "strictly my call."

"I am behind the coach 100 percent," Johnson said. "Our coach made the decision he felt needed to be made."

Fitzpatrick has been a major reason for the Jets' struggles, throwing an NFL-leading 11 interceptions and just five touchdown passes during a brutal start.

"I mean, I don't like it," Fitzpatrick said. "I'm disappointed that we're making the change, but disappointed in my play this year, as well."

"The competitor in me really wants to be out there. The guy who was the leader of this team last year and the beginning of this year wants to be out there, but it's a decision that Todd made. I've got to respect his decision, but I don't have to like it."

After the Jets lost 28-3 at Arizona on Monday night, Bowles said Fitzpatrick would remain the starter. He backtracked a bit Tuesday during a conference call, saying it's always "status

quo" right after games and he wanted to discuss things with his staff and general manager Mike Maccagnan that night. During those meetings, Bowles decided to go with Smith.

"Geno's our starter right now," Bowles said. "We'll see how things go down the line."

Bowles added that it's possible the Jets could turn to Fitzpatrick again at some point.

"I can only go week to week," the coach said.

Smith was the Jets' starter last summer until his jaw was broken by a punch from then-teammate Ikemefuna Enemkpali during training camp.

"I think the person who benefited the most from this last year and a half has been Geno," wide receiver Brandon Marshall said. "It's been amazing to see this guy grow and really, you know, punch adversity in the face."

Fitzpatrick took over last summer and went on to throw a franchise-record 31 touchdown passes and get within a win of the playoffs at 10-6.

After garnering little interest in the free-agent market, Fitzpatrick re-signed with the Jets on the eve of training camp, a move most Jets players celebrated. Fitzpatrick has had a rough go of it this season, including a six-interception performance at Kansas City on Sept. 25.

New York's offensive woes were hard for Bowles to overlook. The Jets rank 26th overall and are last in the NFL in scoring with 15.8 points per game. Their red zone offense is also worst in the league, scoring eight touchdowns in 22 trips inside the opponents' 20-yard line (36.4 percent).

Knicks' Rose cleared in rape lawsuit

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — NBA star Derrick Rose and two friends were cleared Wednesday in a \$21.5 million lawsuit that accused them of gang raping his ex-girlfriend when she was incapacitated from drugs or alcohol.

Jurors in Los Angeles federal court reached the verdict in less than four hours after concluding there was a lack of evidence to support the woman's claims and dismissing her account as unbelievable.

"It felt like she was playing us," said a juror who would only give his first name as Jared. "The second her lawyer started questioning her, she would start crying. I mean, granted, that could be realistic, but I feel I'm pretty good at reading people, and I felt as if it was false."

Jared was among several jurors who spoke to reporters outside the courthouse, none of whom gave their full names.

Rose remained stoic as the verdict was read and later thanked jurors and posed for photos with them in the lobby, draping his left arm around each one who wanted a souvenir of the Knicks point guard as one of his lawyers snapped photos on their phones.

"I am thankful that the jury understood and agreed with me," Rose said in a statement. "This experience and my sensitivity to it was deep. I am ready to put this behind me and focus on my family and career."

The case was X-rated at times with testimony from the men about poolside group sex at a mansion Rose rented in

Beverly Hills in the summer of 2013 and multiple sexual encounters throughout the night and into the next morning.

The woman denied having sex at Rose's place, saying she had a few tequila shots and felt drugged before going home. Her lawyer said the defense invented the story to make it look like she had willingly had sex with the men.

The incident in question happened hours later in the early morning of Aug. 27 when she said the three men came to her Los Angeles apartment and had sex with her after she had passed out.

"All three men were innocent from Day 1," Rose's attorney, Mark Baute, said after the verdict. "We're very happy that the system worked."