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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US operations take on risk in Niger

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The United States has quietly moved scores of additional troops in recent months into Niger, home to the second-largest contingent of American servicemembers on the African continent and an operational anchor for an increasingly dangerous counterterrorism mission.

U.S. operations in Niger provide support for local troops in the fight against extremist groups such as Boko Haram and al-Qaida in the Maghreb. The mission's risks were highlighted Wednesday when four special operations commandos were killed while on patrol. There are now about 800 U.S. troops working in Niger, up from 645 in June, according to U.S. Africa Command. Only the small east African nation of Djibouti, home to the United State's major troop hub Camp Lemonnier, has more forces, with roughly 4,000 personnel.

The growth in troop numbers in Niger is because the U.S. has two "security cooperation locations" in the country, one in the capital of Niamey and a newer outpost under development to the north in Agadez, said Samantha Reho, an AFRICOM spokeswoman.

AFRICOM has set up a series of such locations around Africa in recent years, part of a broader effort to facilitate troop movements and reduce crisis-response times.

On Wednesday, Staff Sgt. Bryan C. Black, 35; Sgt. La David T. Johnson, 25; Staff Sgt. Jeremiah W. Johnson, 39; and Staff Sgt. Dustin M. Wright, 29, all Green Berets with the 3rd Special Forces Group, were killed when they came under fire during a joint patrol with Nigerien troops, the Pentagon said.

"I think clearly there's risk for our forces in Niger," Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie, the director of the Joint Staff, said during a news conference Thursday.

Niger, a country situated between Mali and Nigeria, serves as a launching pad for surveillance of several extremist groups active in the region.

In Mali, al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb has conducted cross-border attacks, while Boko Haram, arguably the most lethal terrorist group in Africa, launches frequent attacks into Niger from strongholds in northern Nigeria.

Special operations forces in Niger play a key role advising local forces responsible for leading the fight against militants. The military has offered few details about the mission

Wednesday that resulted in the deaths of the troops other than to say the forces were on patrol and serving as advisers to their Nigerien counterparts. They were the first combat fatalities for U.S. troops in Niger.

The Pentagon declined to go into details about the patrol that turned deadly. The New York Times reported the firefight was relatively brief: a 30 minute-clash that included about 10 U.S. troops and 20 Nigerien forces.

The long-term implications of the attack on the U.S. mission are uncertain, but some analysts say the result could be a sharpened focus on military efforts.

One of AFRICOM's concerns in Africa is the challenge of conducting search-and-rescue operations on a continent that is three times the size of the U.S. and has limited medical services and infrastructure.

In March, Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, AFRICOM's commander, highlighted those worries in testimony to Congress, which said that search-and-rescue assets in Africa were limited and that the U.S. often relies on contracted services.

McKenzie didn't comment on whether such issues were a factor in Niger but said that enabling the evacuation of forces is given careful consideration when troops deploy.

Turkish forces shell Syria's northern Idlib province

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Turkish forces on Sunday shelled areas along its border with Syria's northwestern province, an area dominated by al-Qaida-linked militants, as Turkey's president said an operation in the area to enforce a "de-escalation" zone was underway "without problems."

Speaking Sunday, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the de-escalation zones would be applied in Idlib with "Russia outside, Turkey inside" with Syrian opposition fighters it backs.

"The process, which began with a step yesterday and started to be applied this morn-

ing, is continuing, as you know, and that effort is continuing in a calm way without problems" Erdogan said, speaking in the western province of Afyonkarahisar at the closing ceremony of his ruling party's conference.

Earlier Sunday, Mustafa Sejari, spokesman for a Turkey-backed Syrian armed group, said Turkish artillery responded with shells after coming under attack from al-Qaida-linked fighters across the border. Turkey's private Dogan news agency reported that Turkey fired seven howitzer rounds into Idlib on Sunday.

The tension came a day after Turkey's president announced

that his country has launched a "serious" operation in Syria's northwestern Idlib province with Turkey-backed Syrian opposition forces following international efforts for de-escalation in the war-torn country.

Sejari said the operation aims to deploy Turkish-backed opposition fighters in the province currently dominated by al-Qaida-linked militants.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Turkish shells fell near a displaced people's camp along the border, causing a panic but no casualties. The Observatory said the shelling was followed by brief clashes and the lobbing

of missiles as tension continued. The Observatory also said al-Qaida-linked militants have deployed new fighters to the area where the brief clashes occurred, in Kafr Lusin village, along the border.

The plan to enforce a de-escalation zone in Idlib involves deploying Turkish special forces and observation points, according to Sejari, of the Turkish-backed Al-Mutasim Brigades. He said the plan is to also foil "foreign projects" that aim to occupy the north of Syria under the pretext of fighting terrorism, an apparent reference to the U.S.-backed Kurdish forces.

Regular war games to resume

US, Philippines to ramp up military exercises in 2018

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

America and the Philippines will return to regular war games starting next year, the chief of the Philippine military announced Thursday while hailing the U.S. as his country's "number one ally."

Military exercises between the nations have been scaled back since last year, when President Rodrigo Duterte called for an end to the drills and the departure of U.S. Special Forces.

Relations cooled after American officials criticized Duterte's war on drugs. The Filipino strongman also called then-President Barack Obama a "son of a whore" and vowed to seek closer ties with China and Russia.

However, U.S. help for government troops battling Islamic militants in the southern city of Marawi and an end to public criticism of the Philippines by U.S. officials this year may have been factors in the thaw.

Duterte said recently that

the dispute is now "water under the bridge" and promised to be "friendly" to the U.S.

After returning from a trip to America last week, Gen. Eduardo Ano — chief of staff for the Armed Forces of the Philippines — said the nations had agreed to increase bilateral military exercises in 2018, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported.

"The president said, 'I want to be friendlier to the U.S.' So we have a closer relationship and more exercises," Ano told reporters in Manila after meeting with Pacific Command chief Adm. Harry Harris in Hawaii, according to Agence France-Presse.

"[Duterte] said to continue engagement with the United States," Ano said. "They are still our number one ally."

Last week, 900 U.S. and Filipino troops are participating in Kamandag, a counterterrorism-and-disaster-response exercise that replaced the larger annual PHIBLEX amphibious landing drills.

Marine 2nd Lt. John Doherty

said in an email that Kamandag involves a beach landing at Naval Education and Training Command on Luzon — the same place where amphibious landings happened during PHIBLEX.

Marines will launch Assault Amphibious Vehicles from the Philippine warship BRP Tarlac to deliver relief supplies and personnel ashore, Doherty said.

"Marine Corps AAVs will be boarding and launching from a Philippine amphibious ship for the first time," he said. "This is a testament to our longstanding commitment and cooperation [and] another tangible way in which our deep bilateral security ties have benefitted the Philippine people, including the progress we have made collectively in supporting maritime security efforts, and our collaboration on counterterrorism to address the shared threat."

Ano said next year's exercises with the U.S. would involve territorial defense, the Inquirer reported.

Venomous snake found on Okinawa for 1st time

By **KEN KUNIYOSHI**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Japanese authorities are warning people to watch out for a venomous pit viper that's been on the move in Okinawa.

A 3-foot-long habu snake was found for the first time last month on Aguni, one of several small islands that make up Okinawa prefecture. The yellow-and-black nocturnal reptile, which can grow up to 5 feet long, lives in groves and grassland. It also can be found slithering through city parks, preying on rats, rabbits, lizards and cats.

It's one of 22 snake species, including eight venomous types, within Okinawa, says the Okinawa Prefectural Office's website, which has been warning people to "Habu Ni Chui!" or "Be Alert for Habu!"

Those bitten by habus experience painful swelling and can die without medical attention, which often involves anti-venom, the website says. First-aid treatment should involve applying pressure to restrict blood flow to the bite area.

Okinawa officials have shipped anti-venom to Aguni and are checking the tiny island to see if any other habu snakes made it there, said Mayumi Arakaki, chief of the pharmaceutical affairs division at Okinawa Prefectural Government's Department of Public Health and Medical Care.

There are approximately 91 habu bite cases annually on Okinawa, including the prefecture's outlying islands, said Sgt. Jessica Collins, of Marine Corps Installations Pacific. Animal Control finds about 20 habu snakes every year at Camp Butler.

It is difficult to determine how many habu snakes are on Okinawa because their primary habitats include jungles, sugarcane farms, wood piles, tombs and trash piles, Collins said.

Aviano home search expands as more airmen arrive

By **KENT HARRIS**
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — The Air Force is looking for Italians with homes to rent within an hour's drive of Aviano as it faces a looming housing crunch due to an influx of new airmen.

The base recently told homeowners already renting to Americans that it's expecting an additional 300 airmen to transfer to the base in 2018.

The base currently has about 200 approved listings in the database available to newcomers.

"There was an expectation that there might be a shortage of homes," said Antony Saponaro, a housing management

specialist, on the reason for the notification.

Aviano is the only Air Force base in Europe that has no on-base family housing. Six dormitories house several hundred single enlisted airmen E-4 and below.

The base recently helped about 350 airmen from the 606th Air Control Squadron find homes when the unit transferred from Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany. That cut the number of available listings by about half. Now the base is bracing for the arrival of units currently based in England: the 56th and 57th Rescue Squadrons.

There won't be time enough for developers to build new homes to meet the immediate

need, Saponaro said. But he said he believes there are likely sufficient rental homes available if developers and homeowners put those properties on the market.

Among those are units — apartments, condominiums or homes — that have already been built but are awaiting purchase. Enterprising Italians might choose to buy them now and rent them to American tenants, he said.

Other options could come from the roughly 530 homes in build-to-lease communities in 19 communities around Aviano that once housed Americans. The base declined to renew options on those homes earlier this decade, with the idea that homes on the open market would be cheaper to rent.

Mike Pence praises US resolve after Vegas horror

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Vice President Mike Pence praised the heroic response by police and the resolve of the American people at a prayer service in Las Vegas, while federal agents hauled away belongings left by concertgoers trying to escape raining bullets from a gunman who was shooting from his high-rise hotel suite on Oct. 1.

Federal agents started removing piles of backpacks, baby strollers and lawn chairs still strewn about the site of the country music festival Stephen Paddock fired on. Investigators remain stumped as to why Paddock, 64, would shoot at the crowd from his 32nd-floor Mandalay Bay hotel room, killing 58 and wounding hundreds before killing himself.

Investigators believe a note found on a nightstand in Paddock's hotel room contained a series of numbers that helped him calculate a more precise aim, accounting for the trajectory of shots being fired from that height and the distance between his room and the concert, a law enforcement official said Saturday. The official spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The unity service came after dozens of people — many wearing shirts that said “Vegas Strong” — marched from Mandalay Bay to City Hall. After speeches from Pence and other politicians, 58 doves were released into the air, flying in a wide arc and then disappearing into the distance as someone shouted, “God bless America!”

Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman told the audience that the focus needs to remain on the victims, not “that horrific, senseless animal.”

Investigators said they have chased 1,000 leads and examined Paddock's politics, finances, any possible radicalization and his social behavior, but Clark County Undersheriff Kevin McMahill said there's still no clear motive.

Trump says ‘only one thing will work’ with North Korea

BY KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — President Donald Trump said North Korea has been making “fools of U.S. negotiators” and “only one thing will work,” the latest hint of possible military action against the communist state.

The comments came amid fears the North may test-fire another missile in connection with the anniversary Tuesday of the foundation of its ruling party.

“Presidents and their administrations have been talking to North Korea for 25 years, agreements made and massive amounts of money paid,” Trump tweeted Saturday.

“It hasn't worked, agreements violated before the ink was dry, [making] fools of U.S. negotiators. Sorry, but only one thing will work!” he added.

A Russian lawmaker said the North is preparing to launch a long-range missile “in the nearest future” based on his recent visit to Pyongyang.

Anton Morozov, of Russia's nationalist Liberal-Democratic Party, said he and his colleagues also were shown North Korean calculations indicating they have missiles that could reach the U.S. West Coast, the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported Friday.

He said the delegation was told the North has technology that would allow the missile warheads to survive the heat when re-entering the atmosphere.

Many experts doubt the North has perfected that essential capability but say it has made major advances in its nuclear weapons program despite several rounds of tightened economic sanctions.

North Korea has sharply raised the stakes in recent months, launching dozens of missiles including two intercontinental ballistic missiles and two others that flew over Japan.

It also conducted its sixth and most powerful nuclear test on Sept. 3.

Trump has responded with

belligerent rhetoric and warnings that military action is on the table. Last month, he told the U.N. General Assembly that he will “totally destroy” North Korea if forced to defend the U.S. and its allies.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has pushed for a diplomatic solution that would rely on punishing sanctions and international pressure to curb the North's ambitions.

But Trump tweeted last week that Tillerson was “wasting his time trying to negotiate with Little Rocket Man,” using the president's derogatory nickname for North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

North Korea watchers have expressed concern about Trump's decision to use cryptic and threatening language, saying it raises the risk for a miscalculation that could lead to open conflict.

North Korea warned Trump's statements amounted to “extremely dangerous military gambling.”

Corker, Trump get testy on Twitter

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An enraged President Donald Trump and a prominent Republican senator engaged in an intense and vitriolic back-and-forth on social media Sunday, a remarkable airing of their party's profound rifts.

In political discourse that might once have seemed inconceivable, the GOP's foreign policy expert in the Senate felt compelled to answer his president's barbs by tweeting: “It's a shame the White House has become an adult day care center. Someone obviously missed their shift this morning.”

Trump earlier had laid bare his grievances against retiring Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., in a series of stinging tweets that contended Corker:

- was “largely responsible for the horrendous” Iran nuclear deal, which the U.S. negotiated during President Barack Obama's time in office and Corker considered badly flawed.

- intended to obstruct the White House agenda.

- “begged” for Trump's endorsement in his

2018 re-election, then opted against seeking a third term when Trump declined. The Associated Press reported Trump, in a private meeting in September, had urged Corker to run.

- wanted to be secretary of state, but Trump tweeted, “I said ‘NO THANKS.’” Trump picked Exxon Mobil's Rex Tillerson.

Not long before Trump's tweeting, White House budget director Mick Mulvaney said on NBC's “Meet the Press” that “it's going to be fun to work” with Corker, “especially now that he's not running for re-election, because I think it sort of unleashes him to do whatever ... he wants to say.”

Corker delivered a rebuke of the Trump White House after the president's tweets undermined Tillerson's diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis with North Korea. Corker said Tillerson, along with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and White House chief of staff John Kelly, are “those people that help separate our country from chaos.”

Corker, 65, announced last month that his second, six-year term would be his last

Iran warns US over sanctions

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — The chief of Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard said Sunday the U.S. should move its military bases farther from Iran's borders if it imposes new sanctions against Tehran, the official IRNA news reported.

The Sunday report quotes Gen. Mohammad Ali Jafari as saying, "If new sanctions go into effect, the country should move its regional bases to a 1,240-mile radius" out of the range of Iranian missiles. U.S. military bases are located in countries neighboring Iran, including Bahrain, Iraq, Oman and Afghanistan, less than 310 miles from Iran's borders.

Jafari rejected the idea of negotiating with the U.S. over regional issues and said if the United States designates the Revolutionary Guard a terrorist group, the Guard — which has suffered significant casualties fighting Islamic State in Syria and Iraq — will also consider the U.S. Army a terrorist group. He said such moves by the U.S. will eliminate "any chance for engagement forever."

President Donald Trump appears to be stepping back from his campaign pledge to tear up the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers, instead aiming to take other measures against Iran and its affiliates.

New actions expected to be announced by the White House in the coming days will focus on the Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah, the Shiite militant group blamed for sowing discord in the Middle East. They include financial sanctions on anyone who does business with the Revolutionary Guard, as well as millions of dollars in rewards for information leading to the arrest of two operatives of Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Gulf Coast escapes worst as Nate steadily weakens

Associated Press

BILOXI, Miss. — A fast-moving storm called Nate brought flooding and power outages to the U.S. Gulf Coast early Sunday after it sloshed ashore outside Biloxi, Miss. — the first hurricane to make landfall in that state since Katrina devastated the region 12 years ago.

The storm hit Mississippi as a Category 1 hurricane with maximum sustained winds near 85 mph but weakened later to a tropical storm as it moved inland, said the U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami. More than 100,000 residents in Mississippi and Alabama were without power following the arrival of Nate, but no deaths or injuries were reported early Sunday. Authorities were beginning to assess the storm's impacts, but most areas in Nate's path seem to have avoided major damage — including New Orleans.

City of Biloxi employees were working to clear debris on Highway 90, the main beachfront highway, before dawn. Nate washed up sand and logs and even a large trash bin into the four-lane highway. Despite the debris, there was little to no damage to structures that were visible. A handful of businesses were reopening before dawn, and the storm surge that washed across the highway

had receded by 6 a.m.

Storm surge flooded the parking structure of the Golden Nugget casino in Biloxi, but a city official said there were no immediate reports of flooding on the floors of any casinos.

Mississippi Emergency Management Agency spokesman Greg Flynn said there were no immediate reports of storm-related deaths or injuries in the state. Roughly 1,100 people spent the night in shelters. "Thankfully, right now we have no major damage reports," he said.

Hancock County Emergency Management Agency Director Brian Adam said Nate's storm surge flooded roads in low-lying areas, but he hadn't heard any reports of flooded homes.

"We turned out fairly good," he said as he prepared to survey neighborhoods for possible damage. "Until we get out and actually get into some of the areas, we really won't know."

In Louisiana, fears that Nate would overwhelm the fragile pumping system of the city of New Orleans proved unfounded. The storm passed to the east of New Orleans, sparing the city its most ferocious winds and storm surge.

Nate has been steadily weakening since making first landfall in a sparsely populated area of Plaquemines Parish.

White nationalist groups rally again in Va. city

The Washington Post

Richard Spencer, who in August led white nationalists and white supremacists in a torchlight march across the University of Virginia campus that touched off a weekend of deadly clashes, returned Saturday night to Charlottesville, Va.

Spencer, a white nationalist, posted video on social media of followers carrying torches to the statue of Robert E. Lee, which the city has sought to remove.

The march coincided with the university's celebration of its bicentennial.

"It was a planned flash mob," Spencer said in an interview Saturday night. "It was a great success. We've been planning this for a long time."

"We wanted to prove that we came in peace in May, we came in peace in August and we come again in peace," he said.

Their message, he said, is that "our iden-

tity matters. We are not going to stand by and allow people to tear down these symbols of our history and our people — and we're going to do this again."

Charlottesville Mayor Mike Signer sent a tweet denouncing the march: "Another despicable visit by neo-Nazi cowards. You're not welcome here! Go home! Meantime we're looking at all our legal options. Stay tuned."

Wes Gobar, the leader of the U.Va. Black Student Alliance, who was trying to finish a paper for class when he learned of the rally, said it was difficult balancing studies while bracing for the next burst of hatred that might seize Charlottesville. On Saturday, some members of his group knelt in protest during the national anthem and the school's "Good Old Song."

Spencer, a U.Va. graduate, said he was unaware that the school was marking its

bicentennial. They have been planning this "for a long time."

WVIR-TV reported that Spencer and his group arrived at Emancipation Park about 7:45 p.m. and departed 15 minutes later.

The video Spencer posted show him and his crowd chanting, "You will not replace us."

They promised to keep returning to Charlottesville, which they argued had become symbolic of their right to speak and also had come to symbolize the tearing down of hallmarks of the nation's history.

Among the chants were: "You will not erase us."

"We are about our heritage. Not just us Virginians. Not just as Southerners. But as white people ... we'll take a stand."

"You'll have to get used to us."

"We're going to come back again and again and again."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Serial drunken driver may lose license for life

ME PORTLAND — A Maine judge said 10 drunken-driving convictions are enough to justify revoking a motorist's license for life.

The judge said Friday he'd make the recommendation to the Bureau of Motor Vehicles as he sentenced Patrick Murphy, 53, of Windham, to six years for his ninth and 10th convictions.

Officials said Murphy twice rammed a car in April and then a month later fell down drunk at a convenience store before staggering to his car and driving away.

Murphy apologized for the harm he caused, and his lawyer said Murphy will get treatment to deal with his "battles with alcoholism" while in prison.

Gator kept in shelter at a home is seized

RI WESTERLY — Authorities seized a 6-foot-long alligator from a home in Rhode Island.

Animal control officer Art Smith told The Westerly Sun the owner of the Westerly residence saw the alligator and alerted police. The reptile seized Friday was owned by a tenant of the home and was kept in a "makeshift shelter" in the backyard.

Smith said it was a public safety threat. The shelter was not "sufficient" for the reptile.

The owner will be charged with violating a Westerly ordinance that prohibits owning dangerous animals.

Kindergartner put on school bus by mistake

NJ ROCKAWAY — The parents of a kindergartner say she was mistakenly

put on a school bus and then left alone at a bus stop before she walked home by herself.

The 5-year-old, who made it home safely without incident, attends the Dennis B. O'Brien school in Rockaway. Her parents said she's never ridden a school bus before because they drive her to school.

The Record reported the school's principal told the girl's parents that a breakdown in communication caused the problem Sept. 29.

Transgender boy wins homecoming king vote

ME NORTH BERWICK — A transgender boy from Lebanon, Maine, has been voted homecoming king at Noble High School.

The announcement of Stiles Zuschlag as king was made Friday evening at halftime of Noble's homecoming game against Greely.

Zuschlag transferred to Noble after he said he was asked to leave Tri-City Christian Academy in Somersworth, N.H., because of his gender identity.

Zuschlag came out as transgender in 2015. He said that being honored as homecoming king "was the most surreal thing that's ever happened to me."

Cops: 1-armed woman fails in bank robbery try

PA EAST MCKEESPORT — Police said a one-armed woman tried to rob a Pennsylvania bank.

East McKeesport police said Wanda Irvin, 51, entered the Key Bank branch about 4 p.m. Tuesday armed with a knife and demanded money. When the teller refused, police said Irvin ran out of the bank and drove away.

Police said a witness got Irvin's license plate, which they

tracked to her home, where they found a knife in her purse.

Police said Irvin acknowledged the robbery attempt and repeatedly told them, "I don't know why I did it."

Police: Shoplifter drank beer and ate corn dog

KY SHEPHERDSVILLE — Police say a man had drunk a beer and eaten a corn dog at a Walmart in Kentucky before being arrested for shoplifting.

Shepherdsville police said in a Facebook post Sept. 29 that store employees saw David Pethel, 55, also load his cart with merchandise valued at nearly \$250 before attempting to leave without paying.

Pethel is charged with one count of theft by unlawful taking.

Court: Flipping the bird is protected speech

GA ATLANTA — Georgia's highest court has reversed the conviction of a man who was arrested on a disorderly conduct charge after he held up his middle finger and shouted at his pastor during a service.

The unanimous opinion issued Monday said David Justin Freeman's behavior amounts to speech protected by the First Amendment.

Pastor Jason Berry, of 12Stone Church in Flowery Branch, 45 miles northeast of metro Atlanta, asked teachers to stand for recognition during a service in August 2014. The court's opinion said Freeman, a homeschooling father, stood and raised his middle finger in the air.

A sheriff's deputy arrived and Freeman was charged with misdemeanor disorderly conduct.

Police rescue hiker, then help him find dog

NJ SPARTA TOWNSHIP — Officials said they rescued a hiker in New Jersey who got stranded while he was searching for his lost dog.

Sparta Township Police Cpl. Joseph Antonello and Officer Steven Guido responded to reports the night of Sept. 29 that a man was lost behind a golf club. NJ.com reported the officers followed the sound of the hiker's voice and found him stranded on a cliff.

The officers guided the resident to the bottom. The resident then asked officers to help him find his dog before leaving. Antonello and Guido were able to hear the dog crying about halfway up the cliff.

Police said the man and his dog were escorted down from the cliff safely and were reunited with family.

Slime time on rise as sea slugs rebound

CA SAN CLEMENTE — It's slime time on Southern California beaches. But that's a good thing.

The Orange County Register said that black sea hares — the largest species of sea slug — are showing up on local beaches in greater numbers.

The slimy, shiny, squishy mollusks are native and feed on seaweed and algae. The ones spotted at San Onofre State Beach and other beaches are about the size of a hand, but the slug's been known to reach 3 feet in length and to weigh 30 pounds.

Julianne Steers, a biologist with the Ocean Institute in Dana Point, said black sea hares haven't been seen in such numbers for a decade.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Harper, Zimmerman lift Nats past Cubs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Things were looking bleak for Bryce Harper, Ryan Zimmerman and the rest of the Washington Nationals. They had accumulated one run and four hits through the first 16 innings of their NL Division Series against the Chicago Cubs.

The situation was hardly ideal. Neither was the mood.

“You do your best to keep your spirits up. You get frustrated,” Zimmerman acknowledged. “I don’t want to say ‘pressure,’ but, yeah, I mean, the tension builds a little bit, I’ll be honest with you. ... Pouting is not going to help you the next time you come up.”

Power, though, will. Harper delivered a no-doubt-about-it, tying two-run homer in the eighth, and Zimmerman tacked on a three-run shot that barely made it over the wall moments later, lifting the Nationals to a 6-3 comeback victory over the defending World Series champions on Saturday, evening their NLDS at a game apiece.

“Sometimes,” Zimmerman said, “it takes kind of just one hit for everyone to exhale.”

The Nationals were in serious danger of falling behind 2-0 in the series, entering the eighth trailing 3-1 after being shut out in Game 1. But the NL East champions broke out with five runs and four hits, thanks to two big swings from 2015 NL MVP Harper — only recently back from a left knee injury that sidelined him for 42 games — and longtime face of the franchise Zimmerman.

“I was kind of bewildered, because it’s not too many teams or pitchers that have held us in check like that for a couple days,”

Nationals manager Dusty Baker said. “I just knew in the bottom of my heart that we were going to explode for some numbers, which we’ve done all year.”

Indeed, his team reached franchise highs for runs and homers this season, and the Nationals were the only club in the majors with four players — including Harper and Zimmerman — who each topped 20 homers and 85 RBIs.

The NLDS moves to Wrigley Field for Game 3 on Monday. The Cubs will have July acquisition Jose Quintana on the mound, while the Nationals finally send out two-time Cy Young Award winner Max Scherzer, who was pushed back in the rotation because of an injured right hamstring.

“The train’s coming,” Harper said. “We’re a great team. We’ve got Max coming.”

Yes, this matchup is suddenly a contest, and not a moment too soon for Washington, which has won four division titles in the past six years but never won a playoff series.

Jon Lester held Washington to one run and two hits through six innings in Game 2, but Cubs manager Joe Maddon turned to his bullpen and everything changed.

Pinch hitter Adam Lind led off the eighth with a single in the first playoff at-bat of a career that has spanned more than a decade and 1,344 regular-season games.

Carl Edwards Jr. then went to a 3-1 count against Harper and hung a curveball.

Maddon defended his decision to have the righty-throwing Edwards pitch to the lefty-batting Harper.

“He made a bad pitch and the guy didn’t miss it, and that’s it. Sometimes that hap-

pens. Bryce is good. C.J. is good,” Maddon said. “Bryce got him.”

With fans in the crowd of 43,860 roaring and twirling red towels, Harper jumped up the dugout steps for a curtain call, throwing an uppercut. Then he flipped his hair on his way back to rejoin his teammates after his fifth homer in 16 career postseason games.

“Bryce always steps up right when it’s the time,” said Nationals starter Gio Gonzalez, who allowed Willson Contreras’ solo homer in the second, and Anthony Rizzo’s two-run shot in the fourth.

“It’s unbelievable what he does and how he does it,” Gonzalez continued. “He’s a story, a movie, everything all in one.”

It was the first extra-base hit for Harper since returning from the disabled list during the last week of September after missing 42 games with an injured left knee. He was only 4-for-25 overall in the regular season and playoffs after coming back until that key, possibly series-altering, at-bat.

After the next two men reached, Zimmerman stepped in to face Mike Montgomery. This has been a renaissance year for the first baseman, who had only 15 homers and 46 RBIs during an injury-plagued 2016, but led the Nationals this season with 36 homers and 108 RBIs.

On an evening when balls carried in 12 mph wind — every run scored on a homer — Zimmerman’s high shot somehow just made it far enough in left field.

“We had them where we wanted them,” Montgomery said, “and we couldn’t get the job done.”

Puig powers Dodgers over Diamondbacks

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Yasiel Puig’s bloop single didn’t even drive in a run. He still flipped his bat, sprinted to first and triumphantly pointed back at his dugout, where the cheering Los Angeles Dodgers pointed right back while the crowd chanted his name.

Some of baseball’s norms just don’t apply to the exuberant Puig. Or to the Dodgers, who are getting huge offensive contributions from practically every spot in their lineup.

Puig had three hits and

drove in two runs, Austin Barnes added a key two-run double and the Dodgers used another relentless hitting performance to beat the Arizona Diamondbacks 8-5 on Saturday night for a 2-0 lead in their NL Division Series.

The Cuban slugger is just one purring component of a machine that has the Dodgers on the brink of an even bigger celebration.

Japanese pitcher Kenta Maeda got the victory by getting three outs of middle relief. The right-hander didn’t make

the Division Series rotation, but Roberts plans to use the 13-game winner as a specialist against right-handed batters.

Logan Forsythe had three hits and Kenley Jansen earned a flawless five-out save for the 104-win Dodgers, who have made their mediocre pitching irrelevant by pounding out 17 runs and 24 hits in the first two games against their NL West rival.

The Dodgers have the majors’ biggest payroll, but their offense is coming from players of all salaries and pedigrees.

And even when the heart of the Dodgers’ order produced little in Game 2, their 6-7-8 hitters — Forsythe, Barnes and Puig — were spectacular.

“We’ve got a lot of good players, and a lot of depth,” Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. “There are so many guys in our lineup that can hurt you. I don’t know how many times they were on base, but (the batters in the) 6, 7, 8 spot, those guys were on base all night, being productive, driving runs in.”

Navy gets past Air Force with late TD

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — For all its misdeeds in a very meaningful game, Navy found a way to come away with an emotional victory in thrilling fashion.

Zach Abey threw a 16-yard touchdown pass to Tyler Carmona with 15 seconds left, and the unbeaten Midshipmen defeated Air Force 48-45 Saturday after blowing a 21-point lead in the second half.

“I don’t know why I am so blessed to coach these guys,” coach Ken Niumatalolo said, his eyes welling with moisture. “Just proud of our players: their resolve, their grit, their perseverance.”

Despite allowing five touchdowns after halftime, Navy (5-0) took a huge step toward regaining possession of the

Commander-In-Chief’s Trophy, awarded annually to the team with the most wins in games between Army, Navy and Air Force.

Air Force won it last season after beating Navy 28-14.

Though beating Army will always be the supreme accomplishment for Navy, this one produced no small measure of joy — especially because the winner of the Navy-Air Force matchup has captured the trophy every year since 1997.

In this one, after Arion Worthman threw a 51-yard touchdown pass to Marcus Bennett with 1:53 remaining to put the Falcons up 45-41, Abey moved the Midshipmen 75 yards in 11 plays for the go-ahead score.

Asked what it took for that to happen, Niumatalolo replied,

“A lot of praying. Trying to get guys in and out of the huddle. Game management. Clock management.”

It turned out to be the final salvo in a wild game in which Air Force (1-4) amassed 621 yards and Navy accumulated 557, including 471 on the ground.

“We didn’t quit and kept fighting to the very end,” Worthman said. “It was just a matter of who was going to get the ball last.”

Well, 15 seconds just wasn’t enough time.

“If we had a couple more minutes left we could’ve put a drive together,” said Worthman, who threw two touchdown passes and ran for two scores.

Abey ran for 214 yards and two touchdowns, and Malcolm Perry contributed two long scores.

Of the last drive, Abey said, “In our minds we felt we would score. The guys did their job.”

The Midshipmen converted a short punt and two Air Force fumbles into three touchdowns and a 28-10 halftime lead. After a 75-yard quarterback keeper by Abey made it 38-17 in the third quarter, Air Force rallied.

But the Falcons still came away with their fourth straight loss.

Perry got the Midshipmen started with a 91-yard run and added a 40-yard touchdown catch late in the second quarter. The sophomore finished with a career-high 127 yards rushing.

Though Air Force leads the series between these two military academies 29-21, Navy has won 11 of the last 15.

Army routs Rice

Associated Press

HOUSTON — For a team that hadn’t been adept on forcing turnovers this season — having just three through its first five games — Army found its rhythm all at once.

Facing Rice, which has been bitten by the turnover bug this season, Army forced turnovers on four straight possessions in the first half to build a big lead early in a 49-12 win on Saturday.

“That was huge getting those turnovers,” Army coach Jeff Monken said. “They helped us. We ripped a couple out. Those paid off. That was the difference in the game. It was the spark from the defense that made the difference.”

Kell Walker ran for 127 yards and three touchdowns and Ahmad Bradshaw added 115 yards rushing and two more scores as Army registered its first road win of the season.

“We knew that this was going to be a big game for us,” Bradshaw said. “It’s our first win on the road this year. We knew we were going to have to come out with high intensity initially. It set the tone for the rest of the game.”

It was Army’s first win against Rice in Houston since 1958.

Rice turned the ball over six times in all — five fumbles and an interception — and has committed 16 turnovers through six games.

Ovechkin has historic night

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin scored four goals to become the first NHL player in 100 years with back-to-back hat tricks to open a season as the Washington Capitals beat the Montreal Canadiens 6-1 on Saturday night.

Ovechkin had three goals in the third period in Thursday’s victory at Ottawa, and then matched the feat while helping chase Montreal goalie Carey Price in the first period Saturday. He added his fourth goal at 16:46 of the second against Al Montoya.

It was the fourth four-goal game of his career and second against the Canadiens.

Penguins 4, Predators 0: Evgeni Malkin scored and Matt Murray stopped 26 shots as the Penguins beat visiting Nashville in a Stanley Cup Final rematch.

Golden Knights 2, Coyotes 1 (OT): At Glendale, Ariz., James Neal’s goal at 3:46 of overtime gave expansion Vegas its second win in two games.

Blackhawks 5, Blue Jackets 1: Brandon Saad, Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews each had a goal and an assist to lead host Chicago.

Devils 4, Avalanche 1: Hobey Baker Award winner Will Butcher set up three power-play goals as the host Devils opened the season with a victory.

Hurricanes 5, Wild 4 (So): Jaccob Slavin scored in the shootout for host Carolina.

Islanders 6, Sabres 3: John Tavares scored twice to lead New York over Buffalo in its home opener.

Maple Leafs 8, Rangers 5: Tyler Bozak, Leo Komarov and Nazem Kadri scored third-period goals as Toronto held off New York in its wild home opener.

Blues 4, Stars 2: Jake Allen made 38 saves and the Blues used three first-period goals to beat Dallas and spoil coach Ken Hitchcock’s return to St. Louis.

Kings 4, Sharks 1: Anze Kopitar had two goals while Dustin Brown and Nick Shore also scored as visiting Los Angeles won.

Flyers 3, Ducks 2 (OT): Wayne Simmonds scored 44 seconds into overtime to give visiting Philadelphia a victory.

Flames 6, Jets 3: Defenseman T.J. Brodie had two goals and two assists and Calgary scored the final five goals to beat visiting Winnipeg in its home opener.

Panthers 5, Lightning 4: At Sunrise, Fla., Jared McCann scored the tiebreaking goal for the Panthers in the third period.

Red Wings 2, Senators 1: Frans Nielsen scored the only goal in the shootout, lifting Detroit to the road win.

Canucks 3, Oilers 2: Bo Horvat scored twice and Jacob Markstrom settled down to make 33 saves after allowing a goal on the game’s first shot as host Vancouver beat Edmonton.

Iowa State surprises No. 3 Oklahoma

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — This Iowa State team is different.

Kyle Kempt passed for 343 yards and three touchdowns, including a 25-yarder to Allen Lazard that put the Cyclones ahead with 2:19 left, and Joel Lanning made plays on offense and defense to lead Iowa State to a stunning 38-31 victory over No. 3 Oklahoma on Saturday.

The loss snapped Oklahoma's nation-leading 14-game winning streak and the Sooners' 18-game run against the Cyclones that dated to 1990. It was just Iowa State's second victory over Oklahoma since 1961, and the Cyclones (3-2, 1-1 Big 12) did it without their starting quarterback.

"There's been a lot of adversity at Iowa State for a long time and there's been a cloud around us," Cyclones coach Matt Campbell said. "I think our kids said, 'I'm sick of it, and we're going to keep grinding, keep swinging and getting better one day at a time.' So at the end of it, here we are."

Kempt, the senior who had thrown just two passes in his career before Saturday, played because regular starter Jacob Park went on

leave for undisclosed personal medical reasons late this week. The Cyclones remained confident, despite having lost 20 straight against ranked opponents. Iowa State's last win over a Top 25 team came against TCU in 2012. It was Iowa State's first road win over a top-five team.

Lanning, who switched from quarterback to linebacker in the offseason, played both positions Saturday. According to the Des Moines Register, he's the first Iowa State player since 1971 to get significant action both ways in a game. He ran for 35 yards, passed for 25 and had eight tackles, a sack and a fumble recovery. He played 78 snaps.

"It was fun," Lanning said. "Coming into an atmosphere like this, you can't ask for anything better — especially playing both ways. It was fun. I can't say enough about my teammates and what they did to help me out. It was a lot of stuff going on for me. I didn't have my best game defensively, but we got the win."

Iowa State got it going after a rough start and finished with 449 yards.

"We should have been better than that today," Oklahoma defensive coordinator Mike Stoops said. "Some of the old scars

kind of repeated themselves today. Our execution as a whole was not good enough. That falls on us as coaches. We haven't played well the last couple of weeks. We are just not making enough plays, and if you do that in this league you're going to come out on the short end of the stick."

The emboldened Cyclones even channeled Oklahoma quarterback Baker Mayfield's postgame antics. Mayfield planted a crimson OU flag at midfield after a win at Ohio State earlier in the season. On Saturday, Iowa State defensive back Everett Edwards took Iowa's state flag and planted it on Oklahoma's midfield logo.

It was the first loss for Oklahoma coach Lincoln Riley. Mayfield passed for 306 yards and rushed for 57, but his Heisman hopes and Oklahoma's College Football Playoff chances took major hits.

"I think it's a sense of complacency," Mayfield said. "We've been talking about it. It's not like it's not been apparent. We've let teams come back in games and give them hope. When you do that to a team that has their backs against the wall — we know exactly how it's feels — it's something that you can't do."

Spartans top Michigan

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Mark Dantonio has done what seemed improbable a decade ago and in the previous century, figuring out a way to help Michigan State have its way with Michigan on a consistent basis.

Brian Lewerke ran for a touchdown and threw for a score in the first half and the Spartans held on to beat the seventh-ranked Wolverines 14-10 on Saturday night.

Michigan State (4-1, 2-0 Big Ten) has beaten Michigan eight times in a 10-year stretch for the first time in a series that dates to 1898.

"I told our football team, every player that comes here, to dream big," Dantonio said.

The Wolverines (4-1, 1-1) had the ball late with a chance to drive for a go-ahead TD, but a heave from the Spartans 37 as time expired hit the turf near the goal line.

Michigan could not overcome many mistakes, including five turnovers and several costly penalties. John O'Korn, replac-

ing injured starter Wilton Speight, threw three interceptions in the second half. Ty Isaac and Sean McKeon fumbled.

"When we got the momentum going, we turned it over," Wolverines coach Jim Harbaugh said.

The Wolverines opened with a 16-play, 64-yard drive that took nearly 7 minutes off the clock, but they had to settle for a field goal and a 3-0 lead. They didn't lead again against Dantonio, who has taken control of a rivalry that has historically been tilted in Michigan's favor. Despite the recent slump, the Wolverines are 69-36-5 in the series.

Lewerke scored a go-ahead TD on a 14-yard run late in the first quarter. He threw a 16-yard pass to Madre London to put the Spartans up 14-3 midway through the second quarter.

Michigan scored its only touchdown midway through the third quarter on Khalid Hill's 1-yard run to cut it to 14-10.

TCU holds off Mountaineers

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Kenny Hill scored three different ways, and got the winning score by avoiding three defenders as No. 8 TCU remained the only undefeated team in the Big 12 Conference.

Hill eluded a defender in the backfield and lunged forward through two more Mountaineers for a 3-yard touchdown run with 2:53 left in a 31-24 victory over No. 23 West Virginia on Saturday.

"This team and the coaches trust me with the ball down there. That means a lot," Hill said. "It gives you a lot of confidence."

That winning TD run came only five plays after an apparent interception was reversed on a review, and after Hill had already thrown a 45-yard TD pass and been on the receiving end of a 48-yard score for the Horned Frogs (5-0, 2-0 Big 12).

"It seems like every week, you guys believe this wants to be a drama about Kenny Hill,"

coach Gary Patterson said. "The guy's 5-0."

Hill is only the second Big 12 player to throw, run and catch a touchdown in a conference game during the league's 22 seasons, while two players have done it in nonconference play, the last in 2008, according to STATS Inc.

Will Grier threw for 366 yards and three TDs for West Virginia (3-2, 1-1), including two long catch-and-run scores in a span of about 2½ minutes late in the third quarter. It was tied at 24 after Grier hooked up with David Sills V on a 64-yard scoring play and then Ka'Raun White for a 76-yarder.

TCU led 7-3 at halftime in the only game Saturday matching Top 25 teams, and after third-ranked and two-time defending Big 12 champion Oklahoma was upset at home by Iowa State.

"It was a close game. Everything that happened in the first half, throw it away," West Virginia coach Dana Holgorsen said.