

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, October 12, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Trump: Aid to Puerto Rico will be limited

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump lashed out at hurricane-devastated Puerto Rico on Thursday, insisting that federal help will be limited and blaming the U.S. territory for its financial struggles. The broadside came as the House headed toward passage of a \$36.5 billion disaster-aid package, including assistance for Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico has been reeling since Hurricane Maria struck three weeks ago, leaving death and destruction in an unparalleled humanitarian crisis. Forty-five deaths in Puerto Rico have been blamed on Maria, 90 percent of the island is still without power and the government says it hopes to have electricity restored completely by March.

Trump tweeted: "We cannot keep FEMA, the Military & the First Responders, who have

been amazing (under the most difficult circumstances) in P.R. forever!"

In a series of tweets, the president said "electric and all infrastructure was disaster before hurricanes."

He blamed Puerto Rico for its looming financial crisis and "a total lack of accountability."

The legislative aid package totals \$36.5 billion and sticks close to a White House request.

For now, it ignores huge demands from the powerful Florida and Texas delegations, which together pressed for some \$40 billion more.

A steady series of disasters could put 2017 on track to rival 2005, when Hurricane Katrina and other storms hit, for the most costly year for disasters ever. Katrina required about \$110 billion in emergency appropriations.

The bill combines \$18.7 billion for the Federal Emergency

Management Agency, with \$16 billion to permit the financially troubled federal flood insurance program to pay an influx of Harvey-related claims.

An additional \$577 million would pay for western firefighting efforts.

Up to \$5 billion of the FEMA money could be used to help local governments remain functional as they endure unsustainable cash shortfalls in the aftermath of Maria, which has choked off revenues and strained resources.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., planned to visit Puerto Rico on Friday. He has promised that the island will get what it needs.

"It's not easy when you're used to living in an American way of life, and then somebody tells you that you're going to be without power for six or eight months," said Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez-Colon, who represents Puerto

Rico as a nonvoting member of Congress. "It's not easy when you are continuing to suffer — see the suffering of the people without food, without water and actually living in a humanitarian crisis."

The GOP-run Congress had protracted debates last year on modest requests by former President Barack Obama to combat the Zika virus and help Flint, Mich., repair its lead-tainted water system.

Now, it is moving quickly to take care of this year's crises, quickly passing a \$15.3 billion measure last month and signaling that another installment is coming next month.

Several lawmakers from hurricane-hit states said a third interim aid request is anticipated shortly — with a final, huge hurricane recovery and rebuilding package likely to be acted upon by the end of the year.

Winds expected to drive next wave of deadly Calif. fires

Associated Press

SONOMA, Calif. — Gusting winds and dry air forecast for Thursday could drive the next wave of devastating wildfires that are already well on their way to becoming the deadliest and most destructive in California history.

Winds up to 45 mph were expected to pummel areas north of San Francisco where at least 23 people have died and at least 3,500 homes and businesses have been destroyed. The conditions could erase modest gains made by firefighters.

"It's going to continue to get worse before it gets better," state fire Chief Ken Pimlott said Wednesday.

Entire cities had evacuated in anticipation of the next round of flames, their streets empty, the only motion coming from ashes falling like snowflakes.

In Calistoga, a historic resort town known for wine tastings and hot springs, 5,300 people were under evacuation orders. Tens of thousands more have been driven from their homes by the flames. A few left behind cookies for firefighters and signs reading, "Please save our home!"

The 22 fires, many out of control, spanned more than 265 square miles as the inferno entered its fourth day. Strategic attacks that have kept wildfire destruction and death tolls low in recent years haven't worked against the ferocity of the blazes.

"We are literally looking at explosive vegetation," Pimlott said.

"Make no mistake," he added later, "this is a serious, critical, catastrophic event."

Residents in the community of Boyes Hot Springs in Sonoma County were told to clear out Wednesday, and the streets were quickly lined with cars packed with fleeing

people.

"That's very bad," resident Nick Hinman said when a deputy warned him that the driving winds could shift the wildfires toward the town of Sonoma, where 11,000 people live. "It'll go up like a candle."

The ash rained down on the Sonoma Valley, covering windshields, as winds picked up. Countless emergency vehicles hurried toward the flames, sirens blaring, as evacuees sped away after jamming possessions into their cars and filling their gas tanks.

Officials voiced concern that the 22 separate blazes would merge into larger infernos.

"We have had big fires in the past. This is one of the biggest, most serious, and it's not over," Gov. Jerry Brown said at a news conference Wednesday alongside the state's top emergency officials.

China rips US Navy ship's pass near islands

Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Wednesday protested the sailing of a U.S. Navy ship near its territorial claims in the South China Sea, saying it would continue to take measures to protect Beijing's interests in the vital waterway claimed by several nations.

A U.S. official said the destroyer USS Chafee sailed near the Paracel Islands on Tuesday, coming within 16 nautical miles of land. The Navy does not announce such missions in advance. The official spoke on condition of anonymity.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying denounced the mission as dangerous and a violation of China's sovereignty. She said the military verified the presence of the U.S. ship by sea and air and warned it off.

"The Chinese government will continue to take firm measures to safeguard national territory, sovereignty and maritime interests," Hua told reporters at a daily briefing.

Helo fire episode 'Class A mishap'

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND KEN KUNIYOSHI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An inflight fire likely has led to the total loss of a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing CH-53E Super Stallion as Navy officials declared an emergency landing and fire in an Okinawa field a "Class A mishap."

The Naval Safety Center updated its website to reflect the incident sometime after it happened about 5:20 p.m. Wednesday. A Class A mishap involves repair costs for an aircraft or government property exceeding \$2 million or the death or permanent disability of a servicemember.

No injuries were reported when the helicopter landed in a remote area outside Okinawa's Northern Training Area during routine training. Japanese television stations showed thick black smoke billowing from the aircraft.

An inflight fire forced the aircraft to make the emergency landing, said a Marine Corps statement issued Wednesday evening. The cause of the blaze remains under investigation.

"Helicopter crashes should never happen," said Higashi Village chief Seikyu Iju, who added that the village has lodged a protest with the Okinawa Defense Bureau over the incident. Iju, who said he was at the site Wednesday night, said at least a third of the Super Stallion was completely burnt.

U.S. military and Japanese police worked at the site into the next day, he said.

"There is fear amongst [the villagers] that [a U.S. aircraft] will crash on private property," Iju said. "When the U.S. military conducts training, they should give full attention to safety. Otherwise, we cannot live with peace of mind."

Local media reported Thursday that both Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its De-

fense Ministry expressed regret over the incident. Joint Staff chief of staff Adm. Katsutoshi Kawano submitted a request to Navy Adm. Harry Harris Jr., head of the Pacific Command, to investigate the cause of the incident and detail potential future preventative measures and safety management procedures, and also called on the U.S. to provide detailed information on the incident as it becomes available.

Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said Thursday morning he plans to hold talks with U.S. Forces Japan officials regarding the incident, according to the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper. Okinawa prefecture has already requested the suspension of Super Stallion flights pending an investigation. Onodera reportedly said he would make a decision on that following those talks.

"The fact that an incident by a U.S. military aircraft occurred causes great anxiety to the local people and is very regrettable," Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Kotaro Nogami told reporters in Tokyo on Thursday. "It is expected that safety must be ensured to the maximum when U.S. military aircraft is used in this country."

Nogami said Prime Minister Shinzo Abe felt the incident was "very regrettable" and called for a crisis management team to be deployed from the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces.

Various protest groups planned to converge on Camp Foster on Thursday evening to protest the incident, a spokesman from the Okinawa Peace Activity Center said. The base is the headquarters of Marine Corps Base Camp Smedley D. Butler, which encompasses all Marine bases on Okinawa, and Marine Corps Installations Pacific. About 200 people were expected to turn out.

burke.matt@stripes.com
kuniyoshi.ken@stripes.com

US Marines launch AAVs from Philippine navy ship

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines launched Assault Amphibious Vehicles from a Philippine navy sealift vessel for the first time during this month's Kamandag exercise off Luzon island, the Marine Corps said.

The tracked amphibious landing vehicles, known as AAVs, launched seven times between Oct. 2 and 9 from the BRP Tarlac, one of the Philippines' two new landing platform dock ships, officials said.

"The No. 1 challenge was that the crew had never had AAVs on that ship," Maj. Timothy Neder, 36, of Modesto, Calif., told Stars and Stripes on Monday during a phone interview.

Five AAVs and 33 Marines from Am-

phibious Assault Company, Combat Assault Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, along with three sailors from Naval Beach Group 1, were involved, said Neder, who commanded Marines involved in the exercise.

The Marines and U.S. and Filipino sailors also practiced recovering the amphibious vehicles onto the Tarlac and conducted three beach landings, dropping off food and water and dozens of American and Filipino Marines, Neder said.

Each of the armored vehicles can carry 18 combat-loaded Marines and is armed with a .50-caliber machine gun and an Mk-19 grenade launcher, he added.

The Tarlac, which holds up to 500 troops, usually carries two helicopters and a pair of Landing Craft Utility boats that are also

capable of transporting troops and equipment to shore.

"It wasn't built around AAVs, but the well deck (at the waterline where landing craft launch) can still ballast and it still has room in there to park," Neder said.

The Philippines, which has clashed with China over island territory in the South China Sea, is expanding its amphibious capability. In May, the Philippine navy commissioned a second sealift vessel called the BRP Davao del Sur. Australia, which is also building its amphibious capability, has one of its massive new landing helicopter docks, the HMAS Adelaide, in Manila this week to train with the Philippine military.

Neder said the U.S. would provide the Philippines with AAVs early next year.

Recon Marines gear up for Okinawa drills

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

NAKAGUSUKU BAY, Okinawa — Members of the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, 3rd Marine Division looked like mere specks moments before jumping from a C-130 during training Wednesday off Okinawa's eastern coast.

A Combat Rubber Raiding Craft on a wooden pallet suddenly flew out, and two parachutes on top popped open. Then, a handful of Marines

jumped in two successive runs as fellow reconnaissance Marines in inflatable craft whooped and hollered below.

The Marines said it was the first time in memory — perhaps ever — that a raiding craft had been parachuted off the coast of the Japanese island prefecture.

The training was meant to prepare them for Blue Chromite 2017, an annual exercise taking place here at the end of the month. It's designed to practice integration between

amphibious Navy units and their Marine counterparts in the region.

Blue Chromite includes amphibious operations from Navy ships from Task Force 76 — headquartered on Okinawa but based in Sasebo, Japan — as well as seaborne raids by the Marines.

After hitting the surface and detaching their parachutes under an unforgiving sun, the Marines swam for the raiding craft.

Those aboard first raced to

pick up their comrades scattered several miles offshore. One Marine's chute failed to submerge right away, and he was pulled swiftly across the water just above the surface.

The Marines, wearing full uniforms, fins and combat helmets, treaded water patiently until they were picked up, medium-sized waves bobbing them up and down in the surf. The group then headed for shore as a team.

The training continues this week.

Pentagon has no plans to increase nuke arsenal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has no current plans to increase the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. In fact, it can barely sustain the existing force, which is decades old and is in some respects almost decrepit.

The arsenal is far from being in the "perfect shape" that President Donald Trump said Wednesday he wants to see under his watch. That is why the government is planning to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on a top-to-bottom "modernization," or replacement, of the three major categories of nuclear weapons — as well as their command-and-control systems — in coming decades.

Those new weapons would replace, not add to, currently deployed forces such as the 400 Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missiles that stand ready for short-notice launch in underground silos in North Dakota, Montana, Colorado, Wyoming and Nebraska.

Trump was asked during an Oval Office photo shoot whether he sought a big increase in the size of the nuclear force, as NBC News reported.

"No, I never discussed increasing it," he said. "I want it in perfect shape." He suggested he thinks the U.S. already has enough weapons.

An in-depth review of the U.S. nuclear force and the strat-

egies and policies that underpin it has been under way since April. The study, ordered by Trump and known as a nuclear "posture" review, is unlikely to be completed and made public before the end of the year, but it already is steering away from any major buildup in the size of the arsenal, said officials familiar with the discussions.

The focus is on maintaining the basic shape of a modernization plan Trump inherited from President Barack Obama, with possible adjustments, and on ways to reverse a long decline in the Energy Department's ability to build and sustain nuclear warheads, according to several officials who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Pentagon review also is looking at the possibility of developing lower-yield nuclear weapons that proponents say would give the president additional options for responding to nuclear threats. Others say such weapons would make nuclear escalation more likely.

The U.S. has an estimated 4,000 nuclear weapons, of which about 1,800 are deployed on missiles and at bomber and fighter bases, according to Hans Kristensen, a nuclear weapons expert at the Federation of American Scientists. The others are held in reserve. The exact number of active and reserve weapons is an official secret.

Family held captive by militants released

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — An American woman, her Canadian husband and their three young children have been released after years of being held captive by a network with ties to the Taliban, U.S. and Pakistani officials said Thursday.

U.S. officials said Pakistan secured the release of Caitlan Coleman and her husband, Joshua Boyle, who were abducted five years ago while traveling in Afghanistan and had been held by the Haqqani network.

Coleman was pregnant when she was captured. The couple had three children while in captivity, and all have been freed, U.S. officials said.

"Yesterday, the United States government, working in conjunction with the Government of Pakistan, secured the release of the Boyle-Coleman family from captivity in Pakistan," President Donald Trump said in a statement.

A U.S. national security official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing operation, commended Pakistan for its assistance in securing the family's release — and described the cooperation as an important step for U.S.-Pakistani relations.

The U.S. has long criticized

Pakistan for failing to aggressively go after the Haqqanis, who have been behind many attacks against U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, its military said in a statement that U.S. intelligence agencies had been tracking the hostages and discovered they had come into Pakistan on Oct. 11 through its tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Three Pakistani military officials, all speaking on condition of anonymity as they weren't allowed to speak to journalists, also confirmed the hostages' identities.

The release, which came together rapidly Wednesday, happened nearly five years to the day since Coleman and Boyle lost touch with their families while traveling in a mountainous region near the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The couple set off in summer 2012 for a journey that took them to Russia, the central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and then to Afghanistan. Coleman's parents last heard from their son-in-law on Oct. 8, 2012, from an internet cafe in what Boyle described as an "unsafe" part of Afghanistan.

In 2013, the couple appeared in two videos asking the U.S. government to free them from the Taliban.

Boy Scouts to widen girls' participation

Associated Press

NEW YORK — In its latest momentous policy shift, the Boy Scouts of America will admit girls into the Cub Scouts starting next year and will establish a new program for older girls based on the Boy Scout curriculum that enables them to aspire to the coveted Eagle Scout rank.

Founded in 1910 and long considered a bastion of tradition, the Boy Scouts have undergone major changes in the past five years, agreeing to accept openly gay youth members and adult volunteers as well as transgender boys.

The expansion of girls' participation, announced Wednesday after unanimous

approval by the organization's board of directors, is arguably the biggest change yet, potentially opening the way for hundreds of thousands of girls to join.

The Girl Scouts of the USA, which had sought unsuccessfully to dissuade the Boys Scouts from making the move, said they remained committed to their single-gender mission.

"Girl Scouts is, and will remain, the scouting program that truly benefits U.S. girls by providing a safe space for them to learn and lead," the Girl Scouts said in a statement.

Many scouting organizations in other countries already allow both genders and

use gender-free names such as Scouts Canada. But for now, the Boy Scout label will remain.

"There are no plans to change our name at this time," spokeswoman Effie Delimarkos said in an email.

Under the new plan, Cub Scout dens — the smallest unit — will be single-gender, either all-boys or all-girls. The larger Cub Scout packs will have the option to remain single-gender or to welcome both genders.

The program for older girls is expected to start in 2019 and will enable girls to earn the same Eagle Scout rank that has been attained by astronauts, admirals, senators and other luminaries.

Trump signs health care executive order to undermine 'Obamacare'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Frustrated by failures in Congress, President Donald Trump put his own stamp on health care with an executive order Thursday that aims to make lower premium plans more widely available.

The president's move is likely to encounter opposition from medical associations, consumer groups and perhaps some insurers — the same coalition that has objected to congressional Republicans' plans to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. Critics say the White House approach would raise costs for the sick while the lower premium coverage provided to healthy people would come with significant gaps.

Administration officials say one of the main ideas is to ease the way for groups and associations to sponsor coverage that can be marketed across the land, reflecting Trump's long-standing belief that interstate competition will lead to lower premiums for consumers who buy their own health insurance policies, as well as for small businesses.

Those "association health plans" could be shielded from

state and federal requirements, such as mandates for coverage of certain standard benefits, equal pricing regardless of a customer's health status, and no dollar limits on how much the insurer would pay out.

Other elements of the White House proposal include:

- Easing current restrictions on short-term policies that last less than a year, an option for people making a life transition, from recent college graduates to early retirees.

- Allowing employers to set aside pre-tax dollars so workers can use the money to buy an individual health policy.

Democrats are ready for another effort by Trump to dismantle "Obamacare," this time relying on the rule-making powers of the executive branch. Staffers at the departments of Health and Human Services, Labor and Treasury have been working on the options since shortly after the president took office.

But as Trump himself once said, health care is complicated, and working his will won't be as easy as signing a presidential order. Some parts of the plan will have to go through the agency rule-making process, which involves

notice and comment, and can take months. State attorneys general and state insurance regulators may try to block the White House in court, seeing the plan as a challenge to their traditional authority.

Experts say Trump's plan probably wouldn't have much impact on premiums for 2018, which are expected to be sharply higher in many states for people buying their own policies.

Sponsors would have to be found to offer and market the new style association plans, and insurers would have to step up to design and administer them. For insurers, this would come at a time when much of the industry seems to have embraced the consumer protections required by the ACA.

About 17 million people now buy individual health insurance policies.

Nearly 9 million consumers receive tax credits under the Affordable Care Act and are protected from higher premiums.

Those who get no subsidies are exposed to the full brunt of cost increases that could reach well into the double digits in many states next year.

Army sets hearing for Bergdahl to enter plea

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl will appear in court next week to enter an expected guilty plea to charges that he endangered comrades by walking off his remote post in Afghanistan in 2009.

The Army announced that Bergdahl will enter a plea Monday at Fort Bragg. A news release didn't elaborate on what his plea would entail, but two individuals with knowledge of the case told The Associated Press last week that Bergdahl is expected to plead guilty to desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. They were not authorized to discuss the case and demanded anonymity.

Prosecutors aren't saying whether they have agreed to limit Bergdahl's punishment. The misbehavior charge carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, while the desertion charge is punishable by up to five years.

A lawyer for Bergdahl didn't immediately return a message seeking comment Thursday.

His trial had been scheduled to begin Oct. 23, but those dates are expected to be used for sentencing now.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: 2,300 bags of heroin found in vehicle

VT HARTFORD — Police in Vermont said they seized 2,300 bags of heroin, drug paraphernalia and cash during a vehicle stop and arrested four people on drug-trafficking charges.

Police said they stopped the vehicle about 10 p.m. Tuesday on a registration violation. The occupants consented to a search of the vehicle.

Two men from Springfield, Mass.; one man from Stockbridge, Vt.; and a woman from Graniteville, Vt., were arrested and jailed.

Semitrailer carrying ice cream rolls over

NM GALLUP — Authorities said a semitrailer carrying ice cream rolled over on a major New Mexico highway and forced police to shut down part of the interstate.

McKinley County Sheriff's Capt. James Maiorano said the rollover on Oct. 6 occurred after the driver veered off into the shoulder and then overcorrected.

The driver was not injured.

Home stalked by 'The Watcher' for sale again

NJ WESTFIELD — A New Jersey house whose current owners were scared off the property by a creepy letter writer known as "The Watcher" is up for sale again.

Derek and Maria Broaddus bought the Westfield home in 2014, but they did not move in after receiving the first of four letters from the anonymous stalker. The family told NJ.com the letter writer requested information about their children.

The house, which went up for sale on Monday, was previously listed in March 2016.

The Broadduses said they can't live in the house because of the letters, which they said came from someone with a "mentally disturbed fixation" on the home. They said they received the last letter earlier this year.

Boy, 3, lost at corn maze, left overnight

UT WEST JORDAN — Police said a 3-year-old boy spent the night in child welfare custody after he got lost at a Utah corn maze.

Police Sgt. Joe Monson said Tuesday the child was apparently left behind while visiting the Crazy Corn Maze in West Jordan with a large family group.

He said the boy was cold and frightened but unhurt when someone else at the maze found him Monday evening.

Staffers searched for his family but couldn't find anyone until his mother called police the next morning.

The boy is expected to be reunited with his family.

Police are investigating whether any criminal charges are warranted.

Mom jailed for pulling gun on slow barber

OH CLEVELAND — A woman accused of pulling a gun on a Cleveland barber because he was taking too long to cut her son's hair has been sentenced to six months behind bars.

Andrea Smith, 31, was sentenced Tuesday. She previously pleaded guilty to menacing, child endangering and carrying a concealed weapon.

Smith apologized at sentencing and acknowledged that she

briefly pulled a handgun from her purse at a barber school in April and that she had no license to carry the weapon. She denied waving it or threatening the barber.

For first time, girls can enroll at St. John's

WI DELAFIELD — When St. John's Northwestern Military Academy opens its next summer session, it will have something absent from the school for nearly 130 years — female cadets.

Currently, 218 boys in grades 7 to 12 are enrolled at the Delafield school. The academy's board of trustees said it considered societal and cultural changes and the role women have in business, education and the military in deciding to enroll female students as part of the school's evolution.

The Journal Sentinel reported President Jack Albert said enrollment was also a factor. It has remained flat over the last four years. When the academy opened in 1884, it began as a day school for boys and girls. It became a boys-only school four years later.

93-pound Petoskey rock to be displayed

MI DETROIT — A 93-pound Petoskey rock illegally removed from Lake Michigan will be permanently displayed in Detroit.

State parks chief Ron Olson told The Associated Press that the big specimen will be moved to Michigan's popular Outdoor Adventure Center, east of downtown near the Detroit River.

The Petoskey stone is Michigan's state stone. It's considered a fossilized coral. When it is wet or polished, a distinctive pattern emerges.

It's illegal to remove more than 25 pounds of rocks from the Great Lakes.

Traffic temporarily shut down by Minnie Mouse

VA RICHMOND — Minnie Mouse temporarily shut down traffic near a downtown office building in Richmond.

An investigator in a bomb suit could be seen going up the steps leading to the building Monday afternoon after police received a report about the large stuffed animal of the Disney cartoon character.

A police spokeswoman told the Richmond Times-Dispatch that police investigated and determined there was no threat.

Nikita McCormick, an attendant at a nearby parking lot, said the 3-foot high Minnie Mouse wearing a pink outfit was just outside the building's entrance and had a bag sitting on top of it.

Lawyer: Man jumped on bus to avoid being hit

MD PARKVILLE — A motorist accused of obstructing a school bus driver said through a lawyer he tried to stop the bus to complain a student passenger threw a bottle at his windshield, then was forced to jump on its hood when the bus began moving.

Baltimore County Police arrested Leverage Doran, 68, on Oct. 5 and charged him with disorderly conduct, obstructing a school bus driver and other offenses, court records show.

Doran's attorney, Steven Silverman, told The Baltimore Sun on Tuesday that his client stood in front of the bus to stop it, but when the driver inched forward that left him no choice but to avoid being hit.

From wire reports

On a mission to provide objective reporting
to America's military, wherever they serve.
Read us online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Yankees complete comeback, knock off Indians in Game 5

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — These young Yankees were unshaken, resilient and as tough as the city they represent.

The baby Bronx Bombers have grown up fast.

Didi Gregorius, following in the October footprints left by Derek Jeter, homered twice off Corey Kluber as New York beat the Cleveland Indians 5-2 in Game 5 on Wednesday night to complete its comeback from a 2-0 deficit in the Division Series and dethrone the AL champs.

The bend-but-don't-break Yankees, way ahead of schedule, staved off elimination for the fourth time in this postseason and advanced to play the Houston Astros in the AL Championship Series starting Friday night at Minute Maid Park.

With a blend of young stars and older veterans coming up big, the Yankees rocked Cleveland and bailed out manager Joe Girardi, who failed to challenge a key call in a Game 2 loss that threatened to sabotage New York's season.

"These guys had my back and they fought and fought," Girardi said. "They beat a really good team. What those guys did for me, I'll never forget it."

The Yankees went 2-5 against the AL West champion Astros, led by 5-foot-6 dynamo and MVP candidate Jose Altuve. But none of that matters now to this group of New Yorkers.

After winning twice at home, and after Girardi said he "screwed up" and felt horrible about it, the Yankees — with little offensive help from rookie star Aaron Judge — came into Progressive Field and finished off the Indians, who won 102 games during the regular season, ripped off a historic 22-game winning streak and were favored to get back to the World Series after losing in seven games a year ago to the Chicago Cubs.

Cleveland's Series drought turns 70 next year — baseball's longest dry spell.

"Nobody wanted the season to be over," Indians manager Terry Francona said. "It doesn't wind down; it comes to a crashing halt. It's disappointing. We felt good about ourselves. We made it harder to win, especially in the last two games."

The Indians closed to 3-2 in the fifth against starter CC Sabathia before David Robertson pitched 2²/₃ hitless innings for the win. Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman, who faced Cleveland in last year's spine-tingling World Series and signed an \$86 million free-agent contract in December, worked two innings for the save.

Chapman went to the mound with a three-run lead in the ninth after Brett Gardner battled Cody Allen for 12 pitches before hitting an RBI single, with New York's fifth run scoring when Todd Frazier raced home on right fielder Jay Bruce's throwing error.

Gardner's gritty at-bat was symbolic of these Yankees. They wouldn't give in.

"We can win a lot of different ways," Gardner said.

When Austin Jackson was called out on strikes to end it, the Yankees rushed to the mound to celebrate with a wide-eyed Chapman. An elated Girardi hugged his coaches.

The Yankees became the 10th team to overcome a 2-0 deficit to win a best-of-five playoff series. New York also did it in 2001, rallying to beat Oakland — a series remembered for Jeter's backhand flip to home plate.

Gregorius, who took over at shortstop following Jeter's retirement after the 2014 season, hit a solo homer in the first off Kluber and added a two-run shot in the third off Cleveland's ace, who didn't look like himself during either start in this series.

One win shy of a Series title last year, the Indians had only one goal in mind in 2017.

They came up short again, and have now lost six consecutive games with a chance to clinch a postseason series. The

skid dates to last year's World Series, when they squandered a 3-1 lead to the Cubs.

Cleveland is the first team in history to blow a two-game series lead in consecutive postseasons.

Judge not. The Yankees advanced without much help from Judge, who struck out four times in Game 5 and went 1-for-20 (.050) in the series with 16 strikeouts — an ALDS record. But the 6-foot-7 rookie might have saved New York's season in Game 3 when he reached above the right-field wall to rob Francisco Lindor of a two-run homer in a 1-0 win. "I didn't do my job at the top of the order, but my teammates came up big for me," Judge said.

Kluber klobbered. Kluber was one of baseball's most consistent pitchers all season, winning 18 games and leading the AL with a 2.25 ERA.

However, October was cruel to the right-hander. He allowed nine runs, including four homers, over 6¹/₃ innings in two postseason starts, hardly what he or the Indians expected.

Kluber overcame a back issue earlier this season and it flared up this fall.

"He's fighting a lot," Francona said. "I think you also have to respect the fact that guy wants to go out there and he's our horse. And sometimes it doesn't work."

Slumps. The Indians batted .171 as a team with All-Stars Francisco Lindor (2-for-18) and Jose Ramirez (2-for-20) unable to snap out of funks.

Sweet swing. Gregorius set a franchise record for home runs in a season by a shortstop with 25, one more than Jeter hit in 1999 when No. 2 led the Yankees to a second straight World Series title.

Gregorius got New York off to an ideal start, homering with two outs in the first when Kluber grooved a fastball. The shot deep into the seats in right raised the anxiety level to an already jittery Cleveland crowd fearing the worst.

Strasburg, Nationals stay alive

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Stephen Strasburg gave Washington everything he had, and it was more than enough.

So much for all those questions about heart and character.

Strasburg shook off an illness and pitched seven dominant innings, Michael A. Taylor hit a late grand slam and the Nationals beat the Chicago Cubs 5-0 on Wednesday to send their NL Division Series to a decisive Game 5.

"I just focused on one pitch at a time and going as long as I could," Strasburg said.

Moments after Sean Doolittle closed out Strasburg's first career playoff win, the focus shifted to the final game of the series in Washington on Thursday night. Kyle Hendricks starts for the World Series champion Cubs after throwing seven sharp innings in a 3-0 victory over Strasburg in Game 1.

Washington manager Dusty Baker was noncommittal when asked about his starter, with Gio Gonzalez and Tanner Roark the most likely candidates.

"You know, whoever it is, I hope they pitch like Stras did today," Baker said.

Standing tall as clouds of mist rolled through Wrigley Field, Strasburg struck out 12, allowed three hits and walked two. The No. 1 overall pick in the 2009 draft has 22 Ks in 14 innings in the series, allowing only a pair of unearned runs in the sixth in the opener.

"I like to think that any game that I pitch is the most important game," Strasburg said. "That's just how I tried to go into Game 4, and now we get a chance for a Game 5."

Chicago wasted a gutsy performance from Jake Arrieta and solid relief by Game 2 starter Jon Lester in its first home playoff loss since Game 4 of the World Series last year.

Can NFL owners punish protesters?

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jerry Jones may want to bench Dallas Cowboys players who don't stand for the national anthem, but NFL owners could find themselves facing a First Amendment lawsuit if they punish football players or coaches for their protests after taking government money into the private business of professional football.

The NFL is a private business — and the First Amendment only protects Americans from free speech abuses from the government. But legal experts differ on whether pro teams who play in publicly funded stadiums or who accepted government money in exchange for patriotic displays like the national anthem could find themselves legally exposed if they punish kneeling players.

The money exchanged between governments and pro football teams could mean that discipline enforced by the team could be “fairly attributed to

a government entity, meaning the employer could not discipline someone for taking a political position,” Harvard Law School professor Mark Tushnet said.

A judge could find it “relevant that some of the stadiums have been constructed with public support and may get continuing public subsidies,” Tushnet said. “It may be relevant that some of these practices were instituted in cooperation with the national military.”

“If the government pays for the patriotic display and the firing is a result of the behavior being deemed insufficiently patriotic, it is conceivable that a claim could then be articulated,” said Floyd Abrams, a First Amendment attorney in New York.

The NFL has been embroiled in controversy over players using the national anthem before games as a platform for protest. Former 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick started the movement last season when he refused to stand during the

anthem to protest racial inequality and police brutality. Kaepernick remains unsigned and wants to resume his career, but other NFL players have picked up his cause and kneeled, sat or made other gestures during “The Star Spangled Banner.”

Jones, one of the NFL's most powerful owners, has said the NFL can't leave the impression that it tolerates players disrespecting the flag and said any Cowboys doing so will not play.

“If you do not honor and stand for the flag in a way that a lot of our fans think that you should, if that's not the case, then you won't play,” Jones said Tuesday on Dallas radio.

Public money is inextricably linked with the NFL. The vast majority of NFL stadiums were constructed or renovated with public money, including the Cowboys' home in Arlington, Texas. The Taxpayer Protection Alliance rated AT&T Stadium as one of the most egregious abuses of taxpayer money, saying the cost to taxpayers has

been about \$444 million.

And the NFL was paid by the military for at least four seasons for its patriotic displays during pregame, as part of defense spending to market to potential recruits. After complaints from Arizona Sens. Jeff Flake and John McCain, the NFL in 2016 repaid the government more than \$700,000 covering payments from four NFL seasons, 2012-2015, for activities including performances of the national anthem, full-field flag details and on-field color guard performances.

There is no guarantee that a First Amendment lawsuit would succeed against pro teams even if they have accepted government money, Tushnet said. Other legal experts dismiss the idea of any kind of First Amendment lawsuit against NFL teams being successful. Rules for NFL player conduct are also spelled out in the league's rulebook, personal conduct policy and the collective bargaining agreement.

Texas sitting atop Big 12 as game with rival OU looms

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas fans have seen this before: a modest, two-game winning streak and a hot young quarterback giving the offense some desperately needed juice.

The question heading into the annual rivalry game with No. 12 Oklahoma is, are these Longhorns for real?

“I'm really excited at the direction we're headed,” Texas coach Tom Herman said. “The sense on the sideline and the demeanor and our attitude is headed in the right direction. We're not a finished product yet.”

The Longhorns' 2-0 start in the Big 12 is their first since 2013, former coach Mack Brown's last season when the Longhorns went into the final game of the regular season with a chance to win the cham-

pionship. Texas booted Brown after that season and the Longhorns haven't been close since as three straight losing seasons under Charlie Strong followed.

Each of those losing years were filled with games and players and that teased Longhorns fans into thinking the worst was behind them, only to be dashed by a critical turnover, a missed kick or a humiliating blowout. Longhorns fans can still hear opposing teams mock them with the “Texas is back!” call after a season-opening win over Notre Dame last year.

The program has been in such a rut that just about every new highlight is tempered by some recent disappointment.

Beat Oklahoma on Saturday and Texas will have its first three-game winning streak since the back end of the 2014 season. At the time, Strong

promised that Texas would never lose five games in a season again. In a way, he was right. Texas lost seven three straight years.

Even this season's emergence of freshman quarterback Sam Ehlinger has to be tempered with caution.

Ehlinger's 487 yards of total offense in the Longhorns' 40-34 overtime win over Kansas State ranked third in school history. But who's No. 1? It's not Vince Young or Colt McCoy. It's Jerrod Heard, who had 527 total yards against California in 2015 and beat Oklahoma that season, only to flame out at quarterback and later switch positions. Heard is now a wide receiver catching passes from Ehlinger.

Oklahoma (4-1, 1-1) has dealt Texas (3-2) several blowout losses over the last 15 years.

More recent history has shown the Longhorns can surprise the Sooners when Oklahoma is a heavy favorite. Texas wins in 2013 and 2015 came when the Sooners were ranked No. 12 or higher and Texas was unranked.

In both of those years, Texas caught Oklahoma when the Sooners were perhaps overconfident amid Texas struggles. That likely won't be the same Saturday. Oklahoma is desperate to regather itself after a stunning home loss to Iowa State. Another loss could dash its title hopes just three games into the league schedule and would be a tough blow for rookie head coach Lincoln Riley.

“Winning is hard and it is something you have to learn how to do. I guess you could say that we're finally learning how to win,” Texas wide receiver Collin Johnson said.

NHL roundup

Hornqvist helps Penguins outlast Caps

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Patric Hornqvist went right back to the net where he feels most comfortable and was in his element once again.

Hornqvist scored a power-play goal and assisted on another in his season debut to help the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Washington Capitals 3-2 on Wednesday night in their first meeting since the playoffs. The Swedish forward who scored the Stanley Cup-clinching goal despite a broken finger and needed surgery to repair it, was on the ice for all three Pittsburgh power-play goals, naturally crashing the crease on each occasion as he's accustomed to doing.

"That's usually where I end

up being and where I get my points and like to be," Hornqvist said. "You have to play games to get better, and it was good to get the win and it was fun to be back out there."

Hornqvist assisted on a goal by Kris Letang, the defenseman's first since Feb. 4 after missing the end of last season and playoffs because of neck surgery. He was also right there for Conor Sheary's goal as Pittsburgh went 3-for-6 on the power play.

Alex Ovechkin scored his NHL-leading eighth goal of the season in the Capitals' fourth game. His goal with 7:09 left in the third period made things interesting, but Washington's season-high six minor penalties dug too deep a hole as a third of the game was played on special

teams.

Christian Djoos assisted on Ovechkin's goal and scored in his NHL debut to become the third defenseman in Capitals franchise history to score in his debut after Steve Poapst and Hall of Famer Scott Stevens.

"First game in the NHL, and you get a goal and an assist," Djoos said. "That wasn't my plan really when I showed up at the rink. I was going to play good and play a structured game and detailed game, but happy with the goal and the assist."

Pittsburgh outshot Washington 36-22 as Matt Murray made 20 saves for the victory while Braden Holtby had 33 in the Capitals' first regulation loss of the season. The Penguins also went 4-for-4 on the penalty

kill.

Devils 6, Maple Leafs 3: Brian Gibbons had a rare 3-on-5 goal, Miles Wood and Pavel Zacha each scored twice and unbeaten New Jersey ended host Toronto's perfect start.

Avalanche 6, Bruins 3: Sven Andrighetto scored twice, the second an empty-netter with 1:34 remaining, and Alexander Kerfoot had his first NHL goal in helping host Colorado beat Boston.

Flames 4, Kings 3 (OT): Sean Monahan scored 1:02 into overtime and visiting Calgary rallied past Los Angeles in Jaromir Jagr's season debut.

Ducks 3, Islanders 2: John Gibson made 38 saves and host Anaheim ended a four-game losing streak to New York.

US men's loss prompting calls for changes

Associated Press

COUVA, Trinidad — When soccer holds its world's fair in Russia next June, the American pavilion will be glaringly absent.

A bumbling, stumbling, tumbling World Cup qualifying campaign ended Tuesday night with a calamitous 2-1 loss to already eliminated Trinidad and Tobago, the 99th-ranked nation in the world, when merely a tie was necessary to eke out the final automatic World Cup berth for the region.

"Unacceptable," tweeted former Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala, a U.S. Soccer Federation board member. "For us in USSoccer more than a wake-up call. Time for revolution. Need long term plan that is smart."

After American soccer's Waterloo, the fallout almost surely will lead to a new coach and possibly a new USSF head. There also figure to be calls for a re-examination of the player development structure, from youth teams through academies designed with the hope of producing elite prospects.

"There is no denying that this is a setback for all of us involved with the game in our country," Major League Soccer said in a statement.

New York Cosmos owner Rocco Commisso, chairman of the lower-level North

American Soccer League that has sued the USSF, called for federation President Sunil Gulati to resign along with board members and senior administrators he put in place.

"In the almost 12 years during which Sunil Gulati has been the USSF's president, little or nothing has been done to enhance our prospects," Commisso said in a statement. "The leadership of U.S. Soccer has failed all of its stakeholders: players, fans, sponsors and those of us who have invested in professional soccer. Getting back on track requires fundamental change in the structure and management of the sport in our country, starting with a change in the federation's leadership."

While fans fulminated over the front office, the next national team coach must instigate a ruthless roster purge. The Tim Howard/Clint Dempsey/Michael Bradley era is over, and pretty much any player older than 26 will be past his prime when the World Cup in Qatar kicks off in November 2022. The Americans won't even play a competitive match for nearly two years, until the 2019 CONCACAF Gold Cup.

By then, Christian Pulisic, at 19 already the top American, should be surrounded with other players on the rise, such as 19-year-old midfielder Weston McKennie, who has started Schalke's last three games in

the German Bundesliga. Haji Wright, a 19-year-old winger loaned from Schalke to second-division Sandhausen, is another top prospect along with forward Josh Sargent, who agreed last month to sign with Werder Bremen on his 18th birthday in February.

Gulati was measured in his reaction.

"You don't have wholesale changes based on the ball being 2 inches wide or 2 inches in," he said. "We will look at everything, obviously, and all of our programs, both the national team and all the development stuff. But we've got a lot of pieces in place that we think are very good and have been coming along."

The U.S. returned to the World Cup in 1990 after a 40-year absence, and soccer grew at an exponential rate, helped by the U.S. hosting the tournament in 1994.

Surprisingly, Arena said no major shifts need to be made.

"There's nothing wrong with what we're doing," he maintained. "Certainly I think as our league continues to grow, it benefits the national team program. We have some good young players coming up. Nothing has to change. To make any kind of crazy changes I think would be foolish. We're building a good system in our professional league. We have players playing abroad of some quality. There's enough there."