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Trump to host Erdogan amid Syria threats

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A day after threatening Turkey with economic ruin if it goes too far in invading northern Syria, President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will meet at the White House next month.

The announcement came one day after Trump publicly warned Turkey it would be in “big trouble” if any American troops in Syria are injured during a military operation Turkey is preparing to launch against Kurdish fighters who had been allied with the United States against Islamic State militants.

The White House earlier this week announced plans to move U.S. troops out of harm’s way in northern Syria because it seemed that Turkey was intent on moving into Syria to confront Kurdish fighters that it claims are terrorists that threaten its national security.

The decision was roundly

criticized by some of the president’s staunchest Republican allies in Congress and Democrats who said Trump’s decision to move the U.S. troops

‘Where Turkey’s concerned we determine our own path. ...’

Fuat Oktay
Turkish vice president

the decision, saying he was fulfilling a campaign promise to withdraw from “endless war” in the Middle East, and he warned Turkey that he would ruin its economy if any American personnel are harmed.

On Tuesday, Trump sent a series of tweets that stirred confusion about the U.S.-Tur-

key relationship. He sent tweets defending Ankara as a big trading partner of the U.S., supplying steel for F-35 fighter jets.

“We may be in the process of leaving Syria, but in no way have we Abandoned the Kurds, who are special people and wonderful fighters,” Trump said. “Likewise our relationship with Turkey, a NATO and Trading partner, has been very good.”

“Turkey already has a large Kurdish population and fully understands that while we only had 50 soldiers remaining in that section of Syria, and they have been removed, any unforced or unnecessary fighting by Turkey will be devastating to their economy and to their very fragile currency. We are helping the Kurds financially/weapons!”

Trump said he would welcome Erdogan to the White House on Nov. 13.

On Monday, two senior State Department officials made a point of noting that while the

Turks had highlighted the invitation in their readout of the call, the previous night’s White House statement had not included any reference to an Erdogan visit to Washington. They said the Turkish readout was not incorrect but suggested that the omission of the trip from the White House statement was an indication of Trump’s unhappiness with Erdogan’s plans for an operation against the Kurds.

Turkey’s vice president said his country won’t bow to threats in an apparent response to Trump’s warning to Ankara about the scope of its planned military incursion into Syria.

Fuat Oktay said in a speech Tuesday that Turkey is intent on combating Syrian Kurdish fighters across its border in Syria and on creating a zone that would allow Turkey to resettle Syrian refugees there. Oktay said, “Where Turkey’s security is concerned, we determine our own path but we set our own limits.”

Program gives enlisted sailors a new way to advance

BY THERON GODBOLD

Stars and Stripes

The Navy made permanent this month a pilot program that allows petty officers second class in certain high-demand career fields to advance to petty officer first class.

To qualify under the Advance-to-Position program, or A2P, petty officers second class must complete necessary training and be within 12 months of transferring to a new command, the chief of Naval Personnel said Monday in an announcement.

Sailors selected for A2P bil-

lets are eligible to wear the petty officer first class rank insignia, a practice called frocking, when they complete all schools and training for the position, the statement said. They will be advanced to the E-6 pay grade when they check into their new duty station.

The eligible career billets haven’t been finalized but are likely to be mostly within operational and technical ratings, Naval Personnel spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Adam Cole said in an email.

The Navy is planning to have a tentative list of billets by the end of the week, with a finalized

list Oct. 25 available for sailor applications online at CMS-ID, the Navy’s career management system, Cole said.

The Navy will primarily consider ratings where there are large numbers of unfilled E-6 billets open and sufficient numbers of E-5s available to advance without adversely affecting manning at the E-5 level, Cole said.

Eligible candidates must have taken the E-6 exam with posted results.

Only active-duty sailors are eligible for the program and they may apply to sea-duty billets regardless of their sea and

shore duty rotation.

However, sailors on shore duty who are due to rotate to sea duty will not be considered for shore duty billets in this program.

Petty Officer 1st Class Shawn Fuller, a Navy career counselor at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday that the program is “a great opportunity for sailors to fill priority jobs and make rank.”

Interested sailors can get more details by talking with their career counselors or by visiting the MyNavy portal at <https://my.navy.mil>.

Navy F/A-18C Hornet makes final flight

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The last Navy F/A-18C Hornet flew for the final time at Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia Beach, Va., last week, according to the Navy.

The last F/A-18C Hornet, number 300, was flown Oct. 2 by Lt. Andrew Jalali, who was born in 1988, the same year that the aircraft completed its first Navy acceptance check flight, according to a Navy news release.

The F/A-18C is a single-seat, strike-fighter aircraft. The airframe has been flown by the Navy's Blue Angels Flight Demonstration Squadron, but in 2021, they will transition to the F/A-18E/F Super Hornets, the

successors of the F/A-18A and F/A-18C, according to Popular Mechanics magazine.

Aircraft number 300 was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 106 at Naval Air Station Cecil Field, Fla., which trains naval pilots on how to fly the F/A-18 Super Hornets. It had been with the unit for its 31 years of service.

The aircraft will now be "stripped of all its usable parts and be scrapped," according to the Navy.

Last April, the Navy announced the F/A-18C's retirement after its last deployment aboard the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson in the Pacific Ocean.

"The aircraft and her pilots have contributed to every major combat operation ranging from the 1998 Operation Desert

Fox in Iraq to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan to the ongoing Operation Inherent Resolve in Syria and Iraq," Cmdr. Thomas Bodine, the Navy's federal executive fellow to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, said in April. "The [F/A-18C's] departure from the Navy's operational roster marks an end of an era."

The F/A-18C will still be flown by the Marine Corps, according to Bodine.

For the past year, 50 F/A-18 Hornets from Strike Fighter Squadron 106 have been transferred to Navy Reserve and U.S. Marine Corps aviation units, and some of them have been preserved in case they are needed in the future, according to the Navy.

Air Force colonel pleads guilty to child porn charges

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force colonel pleaded guilty Friday to receiving child pornography online and taking photos of underage girls without their consent, according to the Department of Justice.

Col. Mark Visconi, 48, of Fairfax, Va., used an online bulletin board dedicated to sharing illegal images of minors between November 2015 and June 2016, according to the release from the Justice Department's Criminal Division and the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Eastern District

of Virginia. A forensic review of his laptop showed that Visconi downloaded and viewed numerous child pornography images and videos using an anonymous web browser.

Titles indicated he downloaded videos of girls as young as 3 years old, according to court documents. In another, investigators noted the girl had a pillowcase with characters from the animated film "Beauty and the Beast."

The plea documents also noted Visconi used his cell phone to create more than 440 pictures focused on the clothed buttocks of minor girls, accord-

ing to the release. In a smaller subset of these pictures, Visconi appeared to take "upskirting" images of some of the girls, who did not appear to know that pictures were being taken.

Sentencing for Visconi is scheduled for Jan. 31 with U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III of the Eastern District of Virginia. Visconi faces five to 20 years in prison and must register as a sex offender, according to court documents.

The charges against Visconi were filed in federal court Aug. 28.

A special operations pilot with two Bronze Star medals,

Visconi most recently served as the chief of the Counter-Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems Task Force at the Pentagon. He commissioned in June 1993 after graduation from the U.S. Air Force Academy, according to his service record.

Other decorations in his service record include the Defense Superior Service Medal, the Legion of Merit, two Meritorious Service Medals, seven Air Medals, two Air Force Commendation Medals and the Aerial Achievement Medal.

Information regarding his standing in the Air Force was unavailable Monday.

Plan offers free video game downloads to troops, vets

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

Active-duty servicemembers and veterans can expand their Steam video game library free through the Games to Grunts program from a nonprofit called Operation Supply Drop.

Games to Grunts is offering digital download codes for several titles, including the most recent additions to the fighting-

game franchise titans Tekken 7 and SoulCalibur 6.

However, only a limited number of codes and games are available, according to a program announcement.

Some of the most popular titles have already gone quickly. Those include Gears of War 4, a third-person shooter that follows a conflict between humanity and a race of ravenous subterranean reptilian

hominids known as the Locust Horde. The latest edition of the series, Gears of War 5, was released Sept. 10.

To redeem the free game codes, gamers need a military ID to register for an account at gamestogrunts.weareosd.org.

OSD defines itself as a "veteran support ecosystem" that supports programs in social connectivity, professional development and community ser-

vice, according to its website.

"We've become experts at putting games in the hands of troops and have learned a lot while distributing over 1 million games since 2010," OSD states on its Games to Grunts program page.

Steam is an online video game distribution platform created by Valve Corp. for personal computers.

Al-Qaida leader killed in US-Afghan raid

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A regional al-Qaida leader was killed in a joint raid by U.S. and Afghan forces last month, Afghan intelligence officials said Tuesday.

Asim Omar, the head of al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, and six other terrorists were killed during an operation in southern Helmand province on Sept. 23, Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security said on Twitter.

The overnight raid in Musa Qala was reported last month after Afghans alleged it had killed as many as 40 civilians returning from a wedding ceremony. The U.S. blamed

the deaths on al-Qaida explosives and weapons but said it was investigating the matter with the Afghan government.

At the time, NDS said at least six al-Qaida terrorists "embedded within a Taliban unit in their hideout" had been killed, including a courier between Omar and al-Qaida leader and co-founder Ayman al-Zawahiri and a local explosives expert.

Seventeen Taliban insurgents were also killed, including "leaders from various districts," and 14 Taliban fighters were captured, NDS said on Twitter a day after the raid.

The agency also posted photos of material that was seized during the raid, including night vision goggles, homemade explosives,

a suicide vest, hand grenades and a motorcycle rigged with explosives.

The incident may indicate that the two terrorism groups still maintain ties, despite Taliban vows in recent peace talks with U.S. officials to distance itself from al-Qaida, which is responsible for the 9/11 attacks on the U.S.

A U.S.-led coalition invaded Afghanistan 18 years ago this week to overthrow the Taliban regime, which harbored the terrorist group founded by Osama bin Laden. While U.S. officials believe al-Qaida in Afghanistan to be a considerably smaller force than the Taliban, unilateral and joint U.S. and Afghan raids continue to target the group as part of a counterterrorism mission there.

US, Philippine forces set for Kamandag exercise

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

U.S. and Philippine forces will practice amphibious operations, live-fire training, urban combat, aviation ops and counterterrorism during the third-annual Kamandag exercise on the islands of Luzon and Palawan.

The activities at this month's Kamandag — scheduled for Wednesday through Oct. 18 — will represent an increase in military capability and demonstrate the ability to deploy forces in the event of a crisis or natural disaster, the U.S. Embassy in Manila said in a statement Monday.

Kamandag — short for "Kaagapay Ng Mga Mandirig-

ma Ng Dagat," or "Cooperation of Warriors of the Sea" — will also involve Japan Self-Defense Forces conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions with U.S. and Philippine troops, the embassy said in its statement.

About 1,850 troops — 1,400 Americans, 350 Filipino and 100 Japanese — will be involved in the drills, according to information provided by the embassy Tuesday.

U.S. participants include the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force and the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit out of Camp Pendleton, Calif. Ships include two San Diego-based amphibious vessels, the USS Boxer and the USS John P.

Murtha, along with the Sasebo, Japan-based dock landing ship USS Germantown.

"New for this year's KAMANDAG, U.S., Philippine, and Japanese forces will conduct assault amphibious vehicle training together," the embassy said in its statement.

"It will also be the first to include U.S. and Philippine low-altitude air defense training and threat reaction training."

Manila, which has clashed with Beijing over island territory in the South China Sea, is expanding its amphibious capability. Last year, the Philippine navy commissioned a second sealift vessel, called the BRP Davao del Sur.

Last month, Philippine ma-

rines trained for the first time with eight amphibious armored vehicles purchased from South Korean company Hanwha Defense, according to Jane's Defense Weekly.

The vehicles, like those operated by U.S. Marines and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, can each carry up to 25 troops and can be armed with a 40 mm automatic grenade launcher and a 12.7 mm machine gun, as well as smoke grenade launchers, according to Jane's.

Kamandag will also feature health and community relations events throughout Luzon, according to the statement.

Tactical drills pair 2nd and 6th fleets for first time

BY SCOTT WYLAND

Stars and Stripes

A group of warships is conducting tactical drills and security operations in the Mediterranean as part of the first coordinated deployment between the 2nd and 6th fleets.

The two fleets working together "contributes to ... our naval forces' ability to address challenges and threats to safety and security," Adm. James

Foggo, commander of Naval Forces Europe and Africa, said in a statement.

This is the first deployment for the 2nd Fleet since it reached operational capacity in May.

The fleet sailed without the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, which remained in port to undergo repairs for an electrical malfunction.

A Surface Action Group comprising the destroyers USS Lassen and USS Farragut left

Norfolk, Va., last month and were joined en route to European waters by the destroyer USS Forrest Sherman and the cruiser USS Normandy.

A SAG typically is a temporary stand-in for a carrier strike group.

The 2nd Fleet was restored last year as a scaled-down version of the Cold War-era naval force that was mothballed in 2011 because of budget cuts.

One of the fleet's primary

missions is to bolster the U.S. presence in the North Atlantic, where Russia is deploying more submarines.

Command of the SAG shifted to 6th Fleet on Sept. 27 after completing operations in the Arctic near Iceland. Passing control of warships at agreed-upon locations, rather than at set boundaries, creates more flexibility and makes it harder for adversaries to predict, Navy officials have said.

Ambassador barred from testifying in probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration barred Gordon Sondland, the U.S. European Union ambassador, from appearing Tuesday before a House panel conducting the impeachment inquiry of President Donald Trump.

“Ambassador Sondland is profoundly disappointed that he will not be able to testify,” said a statement from the envoy’s attorney, Robert Luskin. “Ambassador Sondland traveled to Washington from Brussels in order to prepare for his testimony and to be available to answer the Committee’s questions.”

Trump gave his version of why the envoy was blocked, tweeting that “I would love

to send Ambassador Sondland” to testify, “but unfortunately he would be testifying before a totally compromised kangaroo court.”

Rep. Adam Schiff, chairman of the House intelligence committee, said that Sondland’s no-show would be grounds for obstruction of justice and could give a preview of what some of the articles of impeachment against Trump would entail.

A whistleblower’s complaint and text messages released by another envoy portray Sondland as a potentially important witness to allegations that the Republican president sought to dig up dirt on a Democratic rival in the name of foreign policy. On Tuesday, Sondland had been scheduled to face questions about the episode, the sec-

ond time in as many weeks that lawmakers would have privately interviewed an ambassador about the president’s push to get Ukraine to investigate Democrat Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

Text messages released by House Democrats show Sondland working with another of Trump’s envoys to get Ukraine to agree to investigate any potential interference in the 2016 U.S. election and also probe the energy company that appointed Biden’s son Hunter to its board.

In exchange, the American officials dangled the offer of a Washington meeting with Trump for Ukraine’s new president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

There has been no evidence of wrongdoing by Biden or his son.

Suit: Feds use immigrant marriage interviews as trap

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Alyse and Elmer Sanchez were thrilled when they survived their “green card” interview, a crucial step in obtaining lawful status in the United States. She texted her family from the immigration office as relief washed over her.

The officer had agreed that their marriage is legitimate.

Moments later, Elmer was in shackles, detained pending deportation to his native Honduras, leaving her alone with their two little boys.

“We feel it was a trap, a trick, to get us there,” Alyse said.

The Sanchezes have joined five other couples in a class action suit accusing federal agents of luring families to marriage interviews in Baltimore, only to detain the

immigrant spouse for deportation.

Federal regulations allow U.S. citizens like Alyse to try to legalize the status of spouses like Elmer, who has been living in the country illegally.

But the American Civil Liberties Union says a growing number of officers have “cruelly twisted” the rules by detaining immigrant spouses following marriage interviews. The ACLU is pursuing a similar complaint in Massachusetts and says dozens of detentions also have happened at field offices in New York, Virginia, Florida, Illinois and California.

The plaintiffs say the U.S. Department of Homeland Security is unlawfully using the process as bait.

ACLU of Maryland attorney Nick Steiner said it began in 2017 and seems to happen randomly nationwide.

The Homeland Security agencies — through Immigration and Customs Enforcement spokesman Shawn Neudauer and Citizenship and Immigration Services spokeswoman Jane Cowley — said they don’t comment on pending litigation. But depositions and emails released in the Massachusetts case suggest federal officials were coordinating to target immigrant spouses at their marriage interviews.

“In my opinion, it makes sense for us to arrest aliens with final removal orders as they represent the end of the line in the removal process,” wrote Andrew Graham, a Boston-based ICE officer. “They are typically the easiest to remove, they have the shortest average length of stay, and at the end of the day we are in the removal business and it’s our job to locate and arrest them.”

Biden shifts leftward with plan for higher education

Associated Press

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden wants to make community and technical college free and federal college loan programs more generous as he shifts leftward but not as far as his 2020 rivals.

The former vice president’s \$750 billion higher education plan represents a major expansion of the federal government’s role in educating Americans beyond high school. But Biden’s pitch Tuesday is not as sweeping as proposals from his more progressive rivals, Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, both of whom offer plans exceeding the \$1 trillion mark.

The competing approaches reflect Democrats’ efforts to address spiking tuition costs in the United States and the \$1.5 trillion-plus in student debt held by about 45 million Americans.

The party’s education policy divide is similar to the gap that separates Biden from the two progressive senators on health care, with the former vice president proposing to expand the federal government’s role in the existing health insurance market, while Warren and Sanders propose a single-payer insurance system that would see the federal government essentially replace private insurance altogether.

Jill Biden, the candidate’s wife and a

longtime community college professor, explained her husband’s approach.

“My students inspire me,” she said in a conference call with reporters, “and they ask for one thing in return: opportunity.”

The crux of Biden’s higher education plan is a federal-state partnership to cover community college tuition and technical training. Biden calls for the federal government to cover 75% of the tuition costs, with states covering the rest. That’s a financing concept similar to that of the Medicaid insurance program for the poor and the disabled, with states required to cover some costs to qualify for federal money to cover the majority of the program.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cops: Victim's relative fatally hit suspect

KY LOUISVILLE — Authorities in Kentucky said a family member of a stabbing victim drove to help their relative and ended up hitting and killing the man suspected of the attack.

News outlets reported Louisville Metro Police responded to a private, 24-hour fishing spot early Sunday morning on reports two men had gotten into a fight and were injured. Officers said one man emerged from the woods near the lake and attacked another man with a knife.

Police said a relative of the stabbing victim then drove to the lake to give their family member aid and struck and killed the suspect with their car. No arrests have been made.

Aerial attack against fire ants launched

HI NAHIKU — Hawaii scientists used helicopters to launch an aerial attack against an invasive ant species in east Maui.

The Maui Invasive Species Committee and Hilo-based Hawaii Ant Lab sprayed low-toxicity gel bait from helicopters last week to curb the stinging pests in the Nahiku forest, Maui News reported.

Fifteen helicopters were part of the effort to treat an infestation of the little fire ants.

Boy dragged, hit by bus as he exited

NC TAYLORTOWN — A 12-year-old boy in North Carolina was dragged and hit by his school bus after his backpack got caught in its doors and dropped him in the path of an oncoming tire.

Zion Baker told reporters he was getting off his West Pine Middle School bus in Taylortown last week when the doors closed around his backpack and the driver took off. He said he was briefly dragged, but freed himself and dropped onto the road, where his left arm was run over and fractured.

WRAL-TV reported driver Kim Crawford, 43, is charged with reckless driving. The school district said the driver isn't currently driving a bus.

Balloon pops are mistaken for gunfire

MS JACKSON — The sound of balloons popping at the Mississippi State Fair panicked a skittish crowd, leaving some people injured.

Hinds County sheriff's Maj. Pete Luke told the Clarion Ledger that several people fought at the Jackson fairgrounds Friday night just before balloons began popping at a nearby game station. Luke said the crowd mistook the unexpected noise for gunfire and panicked and ran.

He said about 30 people were later examined by medics and several were injured.

Woman arrested after climbing into ceiling

FL PORT CHARLOTTE — Officials said a Florida woman tried to avoid shoplifting charges by climbing into the ceiling of a Big Lots store, leading deputies on a five-hour search.

The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office said in a statement that Kristina Perkins, 37, went into the store restroom and climbed up the ceiling by removing some tiles. Officers arrived and used ladders to take down tiles throughout the store, making contact with

Perkins at times.

An hour after the search was called off past midnight on Friday, a deputy stayed and saw Perkins climbing down a stack of shelves. Perkins faces criminal mischief, petit theft, resisting law enforcement without violence and other charges.

Creamery hopes to turn whey into vodka

OR CANBY — An Oregon creamery is working with a distiller to turn whey into vodka.

KOIN-TV reported TMK Creamery, near Canby, is working with Jason Greenwood, of Divine Distillers of Salem, on the venture. Greenwood said whey-based vodka is not common. He said they have been working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Oregon State University to "perfect" the process.

According to the university, most milk that goes into a cheese-making facility comes out as whey, which it said can be expensive to dispose of in landfills. The university said turning whey into protein powders requires equipment that can be too expensive for small creameries.

Deer crashes through window of hair salon

NY LAKE RONKONKOMA — A deer crashed through the window of a Long Island hair salon Saturday and ran amok before breaking out the front door with a straightening iron in tow.

The buck's surprise visit to the Be.you.tiful salon in Lake Ronkonkoma was captured by the salon's security camera and widely shared on social media.

Salon owner Jenisse Heredia said she was cutting a client's hair when she heard "this wild

crash" and thought it was a car.

The buck ran to the break room at the back of the shop, came back out and hit a mirror, then ran out with an iron caught on its antlers, Heredia said.

Police said one client suffered leg and head pain and was treated at a hospital.

Helicopter wheel found in ceiling

IL LYNWOOD — The owner of a suburban Chicago flight school is taking responsibility for a wheel found lodged in the ceiling of a house over the weekend.

Amy Summers, of Summer-Skyz Inc. of Lansing, said the wheel that homeowner Linda Taylor-Whitt found hanging from the ceiling of their bathroom late Saturday is a helicopter ground-handling wheel.

Taylor-Whitt said she and her family discovered the wheel when they returned from dinner.

Stolen duffel bag was filled with snakes

CA SAN JOSE — A California reptile lover said thieves who made off with his duffel bag probably thought they were taking swag. But it was full of snakes.

Brian Gundy, who breeds and sells reptiles through his business, For Goodness Snakes, had given a presentation at Martin Luther King Library in downtown San Jose on Saturday and left his gear in a parking garage to retrieve his car. When he returned, he found a duffel bag containing three pythons and a lizard was gone.

Gundy said two snakes were later found in a dumpster but he's worried about the safety of the other reptiles.

From wire reports

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Scherzer, Zimmerman stymie Dodgers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Max Scherzer is 35. So is Ryan Zimmerman.

The Washington Nationals would not be headed to a win-or-go-home Game 5 in their NL Division Series against the Los Angeles Dodgers without them.

"We're a bunch of viejos. We're old guys," Scherzer joked. "Old guys can still do it."

Sure can. And for a guy whose teams used to lose repeatedly in the postseason, Scherzer sure is delivering now.

Every time he's pitched this October, the Nationals have won. His latest outing was a season-saving, seven-inning masterpiece that combined with Zimmerman's three-run parabola of a homer to lift the wild-card Nationals to a 6-1 victory over league-best Los Angeles on Monday night, tying the best-of-five NLDS at two games apiece.

"I was just gassed. I was out," said Scherzer, who threw 109

itches. "I was empty in the tank."

Scowling and muttering to himself as showers fell for part of his gritty performance, Scherzer allowed one run and four hits while striking out nine — and, most importantly for Washington, he prevented LA from closing out the NLDS after taking a 2-1 lead into Game 4.

"He really gave it all he had," said Anthony Rendon, who drove in three runs for Washington.

With fans who braved rain chanting, "Beat LA!" in the late going, Sean Doolittle and Daniel Hudson combined to get the last six outs for Washington, which will send Stephen Strasburg to the mound against Walker Buehler on Wednesday night at Los Angeles.

"If I could bet, I'd bet on him," Nationals outfielder Adam Eaton said about Strasburg. "He's a very good pitcher. A polished pitcher. To have him healthy and ready to go in that situation only boosts our confidence."

Whichever team advances to the NL Championship Series will face the Braves or Cardinals next. Their NLDS heads to a Game 5 at Atlanta on Wednesday.

Zimmerman showed what he still can do at the plate by taking a 97 mph pitch, the second thrown by reliever Pedro Baez, and turning it into a high-arching 400-foot-plus rainbow that descended onto the green batter's eye in straightaway center field for a three-run shot that made it 5-1.

"Zim put a really good swing on it," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

That was after Julio Urias, LA's third pitcher and the one charged with the loss, began the fifth by serving up a line-drive single to Trea Turner, who finished with three hits. Rendon, who led the majors with 126 RBIs during the regular season but entered Monday with just one in the playoffs, delivered a run-scoring single that made it 2-1.

Rendon also brought home

runs via sacrifice flies in the third and sixth.

That was plenty for Scherzer, who clenched his teeth while getting through his last inning after loading the bases by issuing a pair of walks with one out in the seventh. But he got out of that by striking out pinch-hitter Chris Taylor and getting Joc Pederson — whose liner on a first-pitch cut landed about an inch foul — to ground out.

Scherzer shook his arms and yelled as he stalked to the home dugout.

"You can't say enough about his compete," Roberts said. "He just sort of wills his way to getting outs."

The Dodgers' lone run came when Justin Turner connected for a no-doubt-about-it homer to left on Scherzer's 10th pitch, a 95 mph fastball. But from there, facing an LA lineup stacked with a half-dozen lefty hitters, Scherzer displayed the sort of ornery dominance that helped him win three Cy Young Awards.

Molina's sac fly lifts Cardinals into Game 5 of NLDS

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — They all knew. Every single one of them. Paul Goldschmidt and all the St. Louis Cardinals. Ozzie Albies and the rest of the Atlanta Braves.

Tough to beat Yadier Molina in a big postseason spot.

Molina pushed the Cardinals to a deciding Game 5 of the NL Division Series, poking a tying single in the eighth inning and then lifting a sacrifice fly in the 10th to beat the Braves 5-4 Monday.

"I like those moments," Molina said.

No kidding.

Molina slung his bat far into the outfield after his winning swing, and the crowd at Busch Stadium roared with the longtime heart of the franchise.

"An elite, special player,

that's what he is," Cardinals manager Mike Shildt said.

Game 5 will be Wednesday back in Atlanta. The Cardinals will have ace Jack Flaherty on the mound, and the Braves will go with Mike Foltynewicz.

"In front of our home fans on Wednesday a Game 5," first baseman Freddie Freeman said. "That's what it's all about so we'll be ready to go."

Kolten Wong led off the St. Louis 10th with a ground-rule double against Julio Teheran. After Goldschmidt was intentionally walked, Wong advanced on Marcell Ozuna's forceout and easily scampered home on Molina's fly to the front of the warning track in left field.

Wong threw his hands in the air as he ran toward the plate. Molina rounded first base with his bat in hand, then flung it

away as the celebration erupted. He discarded his batting helmet as the rest of the Cardinals poured onto the field.

"I lost it right there," the 37-year-old catcher said. "I think I tossed the bat in the bullpen."

Molina also made a throat-slashing gesture as he left the field. Braves star Ronald Acuna Jr. made a similar motion across the top of his chest after hauling in Molina's flyball for the final out of Atlanta's 3-1 win Sunday.

Before coming up with his first career game-ending RBI in the postseason, Molina tied it at 4 with a two-out single in the eighth that went just off the top of the glove of a leaping Freeman.

"I thought it was going in there," the 6-foot-5 Freeman said. "I just needed to be 6-7."

On this day, there was no de-

nying the nine-time All-Star in red. Albies homered and drove in three runs for Atlanta, and Acuna Jr. had four hits. But the NL East champions went 0-for-9 with runners in scoring position, a continuing problem in the postseason over the past two years.

The Braves left the bases loaded in the sixth and seventh. Acuna was stranded on third when Josh Donaldson flied out in the ninth.

"We're a hit away from — just some productive outs — from continuing to add on," manager Brian Snitker said.

Ozuna homered twice for St. Louis, and Goldschmidt also connected. But the NL Central champions were four outs from a second straight difficult loss before Molina delivered down the stretch.

Yanks eliminate Twins, advance to ALCS

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The last time the New York Yankees won the World Series, a full decade ago, Gleyber Torres was not yet a teenager in Venezuela.

Boosted by an age-defiant performance by their 22-year-old star second baseman, the Yankees moved one step closer to that elusive trophy.

Torres got New York going with a second-inning home run, scored after each of his two doubles and made a pair of sparkling defensive plays, fueling the Yankees to a 5-1 victory over Minnesota on Monday night that finished yet another Division Series sweep of the Twins. “He’s a really special player,” first baseman DJ LeMahieu said. “No moment’s too big for him.”

Didi Gregorius hit two RBI singles, Cameron Maybin homered and Aroldis Chapman struck out three batters in a five-out save for the Yankees, who completed the three-game wipeout and pushed their post-

season winning streak over the Twins to 13 games. LeMahieu, Gregorius and Aaron Judge also made outstanding defensive plays for key outs.

“All we did was to go out there and play our best baseball,” said Gregorius, who went 4-for-10 with six RBIs in the series and is 23 for 50 with seven homers and 33 RBIs in his last 14 games against Minnesota.

Following a 103-win regular season and their first AL East title since 2012, the Yankees will start the AL Championship Series on Saturday, either at Houston or at home against Tampa Bay.

“We’re focused already to the second series,” Torres said.

Thanks largely to their talented young second baseman.

With the Yankees employing an aggressive shift that had him in shallow right field, Torres slid and scooped a sharp grounder by Eddie Rosario with two on in the fifth and managed to throw him out to end the inning. In the seventh, Torres made a slick

stop on a grounder by Jorge Polanco and flipped to Zack Britton covering first. Torres even stole third base after his double in the ninth.

“He played so well in this series, and then today, I think, just continued to show the world just how good a player he is on both sides of the ball,” New York manager Aaron Boone said.

Torres became the fifth-youngest Yankees player to hit a postseason homer, with only Yogi Berra, Mickey Mantle, Tony Kubek and Derek Jeter doing it at younger ages.

The last time the Twins beat the Yankees in a playoff game? Torres was only 7.

AL Central champion Minnesota became the first 100-win team swept in the Division Series and dropped to 2-16 against the Yankees in the playoffs, including 0-13 since winning the 2004 ALDS opener. Outscored 23-7 in the series, the Twins batted just .218. After hitting a record 307 homers, they had just four in the Division Series,

all solo shots.

Minnesota went 1-for 12 with runners in scoring position and stranded 11, falling to 3-for-28 in the series with 25 left on base. “Our guys should be walking out of that clubhouse with our heads held high, and they never stopped playing,” manager Rocco Baldelli said. “We got beat over the last three days, and there’s no way around that. That’s going to happen from time to time, but what an amazing season it was.”

Yankees starter Luis Severino pitched out of trouble for four scoreless innings in just his fourth big league appearance after recovering from a spring training lat muscle injury, escaping a bases-loaded, no-outs jam in the second.

Chad Green, the third of five Yankees relievers, got four outs for the win and Chapman froze Nelson Cruz with a 99 mph called third strike to end it. Yankees relievers allowed three runs in 13¹/₃ innings in the series.

Morton befuddles former team as Rays stay alive

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Charlie Morton to the rescue, again.

Kevin Kiermaier hit a go-ahead, three-run homer as Tampa Bay teed off on Zack Greinke, and the Rays got another clutch playoff performance from Morton to beat the Houston Astros 10-3 Monday and cut their AL Division Series deficit to 2-1.

Facing the team he helped win the World Series two years ago, Morton allowed one run and three hits while striking out nine over five innings. The 35-year-old right-hander is 4-0 with a 0.95 ERA in four career elimination starts, including last week’s wild-card win at Oakland.

“It’s just what Charlie’s done all year,” manager Kevin Cash said. “He’s got that knack for doing some special things for

us, and he did it again.”

Astros manager AJ Hinch announced after the game that Houston will start Justin Verlander on three days of rest in Game 4 of the best-of-five matchup at Tropicana Field on Tuesday. Tampa Bay will use Diego Castillo as an opener.

“He’s one of the best pitchers in the world. No more complicated than that,” Hinch said of Verlander. “He’s ready, and it’s his game.”

The series winner advances to the AL Championship Series against the New York Yankees, who finished a three-game sweep of Minnesota in the other ALDS on Monday night.

Kiermaier got the wild-card Rays going with his long home run in the second inning. Ji-Man Choi and Brandon Lowe added solo shots off Greinke, who has never won at Tampa Bay, and Willy Adames added a solo drive against Wade Miley

in the sixth.

Tampa Bay’s four home runs matched a franchise record for a postseason game. The Rays did it in last week’s 5-1 wild-card victory against the Athletics.

“For us to put three runs on the board, that felt great. That was huge for us,” Kiermaier said. “After that, it’s just, ‘Hey, Charlie Morton, go do your thing, go do what you do.’ And he did just that.”

Jose Altuve homered for the Astros, who are one victory from their third straight appearance in the ALCS, and had two of Houston’s three hits off Morton.

Morton, who won 29 games for Houston over two seasons before joining the Rays as a free agent last offseason, departed with an 8-1 lead. Four relievers finished the combined seven-hitter for the Rays, who have never been swept in a

playoff series.

Now, they must avoid being “Verlanderred” — a term coined by Cash after the series opener — in Game 4.

“He’s tough. We’ve got to enjoy what we accomplished today and certainly hope we can have better at-bats, production, get something going against him,” Cash said. “We’ll worry about that (Tuesday). Right now, the guys are pretty pumped about what they just did tonight.”

Verlander, who pitched seven scoreless innings to win Game 1, has only started on fewer than the standard four days of rest once. That was in the 2011 ALDS, when his first appearance was limited to one inning by rain.

“The thought process is five-game series are pretty crazy and we’ve got to win. Never know what can happen,” Verlander said.

49ers pound the Browns, reach 4-0

By MICHAEL WAGAMAN

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Richard Sherman has a strong message for anyone still doubting the unbeaten San Francisco 49ers.

“Don’t flip-flop,” Sherman said after the 49ers thumped the Cleveland Browns 31-3 on Monday night. “If you said we weren’t going to make it, you said we were some way early on, stick with that position. Hold it. Don’t try to give us credit now. At least stick by your word because I want you to sound like an idiot at the end. We know what we have in the building.”

What the 49ers have is their best start since Joe Montana was throwing touchdowns to Jerry Rice.

But it wasn’t the passing game that carried San Francisco. A steady, pounding running game and a dominant defensive effort did the trick this time.

Matt Breida ran 83 yards for a touchdown on San Francisco’s first play from scrimmage, Baker Mayfield was harassed into his worst game as a pro, and the 49ers stayed unbeaten for their best start in nearly 30 years.

Even then, there were some questioning San Francisco’s legitimacy.

“I feel like they’re going to say that all year about us,” said Breida, who had 114 yards on 11 carries. “I don’t think anyone

expected us to be 4-0 this year, to be honest. Probably expected us to be 0-4. They can say whatever they want. All that matters is who’s in this locker room.”

Tevin Coleman added a 19-yard score as part of a dominant ground game on a day when quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo passed for 181 yards and kicker Robbie Gould missed two field goal attempts and had a third blocked.

Breida and Coleman combined for 211 rushing yards as San Francisco outgained Cleveland 275-102 on the ground.

“It’s something you always want to do as a coach,” 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said. “It’s the easiest way to win. You play real good defense and you can run the ball, that takes some pressure off a lot of people and doesn’t put you in a lot of risky situations.”

San Francisco (4-0) joined the New England Patriots (5-0) as the only remaining undefeated teams in the NFL. It’s the first time the 49ers have won their first four games since 1990.

The Browns (2-3) are headed the opposite direction after losing two of three, with fresh concerns about their young quarterback.

“You can’t have mistakes. You can’t have turnovers. You can’t have drops. You can’t have penalties,” Cleveland coach Freddie Kitchens said. “Offensively, that kind of summed us up. We just shot ourselves in

the foot too many times.”

Mayfield had a horrible game. The No. 1 overall pick last year, Mayfield completed eight of 22 passes for a career-low 100 yards, had a 13.4 passer rating, threw two interceptions, fumbled twice and was sacked four times before being pulled in the fourth quarter.

It’s the first time in Mayfield’s 18 career starts that he failed to throw a touchdown pass.

“It was like one step forward, two back,” Mayfield said. “No rhythm for the offense to get into. And when we did, we just got down in the red zone and didn’t finish. The inconsistency is killing us right now.”

Things were rough all around for Mayfield.

San Francisco defensive end Nick Bosa poked fun at the Browns quarterback after forcing Mayfield into a hurried incomple- tion in the second quarter. Bosa, the second overall draft pick, got up and pretended to wave a flag and plant it in the turf as the crowd roared. It was a clear shot at Mayfield, who planted an Oklahoma flag in the turf after leading the Sooners to a victory over Bosa and Ohio State in 2017.

“I think everybody knows what that was for,” Bosa said. “Just wanted to get pay- back. He had it coming.”

NHL roundup

Jackets get much-needed victory in overtime

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — With the game tied 3-3 in overtime, Nick Foligno stole the puck from Buffalo’s Jack Eichel at the back boards and passed out to Alexandre Texier skating free through the right circle. The rookie sealed the first win of the season for the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The 20-year-old Texier’s snap shot past Linus Ullmark 2:08 into overtime lifted Columbus to a 4-3 win over Buffalo on Monday night. It also gave the Blue Jack- ets a much-needed shot of confidence after losing their first two games by a combined score of 10-3.

“(Foligno) came out with the puck — he did a great job,” Texier said. “I was alone in the middle.”

After going up 2-0 in the first period, Co- lumbus let the Sabres climb back in. With the Blue Jackets leading 3-2 late, Buffalo

pulled its goalie on a power play to create a 6-on-4 advantage and got a goal from Vic- tor Olofsson to tie the score.

That set the stage for Texier’s heroics. “Well deserved,” Columbus coach John Tortorella said. “He was probably our best forward, our most consistent forward tonight.”

Foligno, Oliver Bjorkstrand and Cam Atkinson also scored for the Blue Jackets, who outshot Buffalo 44-18. Joonas Kor- pisalo had 15 saves.

Marcus Johansson and Jeff Skinner added goals for Buffalo, and Ullmark, making his first start of the season, had 40 saves.

“We’ve just got recharge, be a little bit sour about the loss today,” Ullmark said. “It’s going to be a new day tomorrow. There’s nothing else to it.”

It was the first loss for Buffalo.

“After a couple of games where every- thing went our way, we struggled to find our game, especially in the first period,” coach Ralph Krueger said. “Linus gave us a chance. We still showed character to- night to come back from two down, thanks to Linus buying us some time.”

Blues 3, Maple Leafs 2: Alex Pi- etrangelo scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period, leading visiting St. Louis past Toronto.

Oskar Sundqvist and Brayden Schenn also scored for the defending champion Blues, who have earned points in their first three games this season (2-0-1). Jordan Binnington stopped 32 shots.

Frederik Gauthier and William Nyland- er scored for Toronto, which has dropped two straight (2-1-1). Frederik Andersen finished with 26 saves.