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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US to send 2,000 troops to deter Iran

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will send about 2,000 troops to Saudi Arabia as part of its efforts to deter Iranian aggression in the wake of several attacks attributed to the regime or its proxy forces in recent months, the Defense Department announced Friday.

The new deployment largely consists of fighter jets and air defense capabilities and follows the deployment of other troops last month to bolster Saudi defenses after September attacks that devastated two key Saudi oil facilities. Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Friday called out Iran for those Sept. 14 drone and cruise missile strikes, claiming evidence at the site proves Tehran was to blame.

"It is clear that the Iranians are responsible for the recent attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities," the defense chief told reporters Friday at the Pentagon. "Our international partners agree, including the

United Kingdom, France and Germany, who have said so publicly."

Esper urged those and other "like-minded" nations to provide additional defensive capabilities to the Middle East to deter Iranian aggression. He issued a stern warning to the Iranian regime, which has repeatedly denied involvement in the attacks on oil facilities and tankers in the region.

"Do not strike another sovereign state, do not threaten American interests, American forces, or we will respond," Esper said, directed at Iran. "Do not mistake our restraint for weakness. If you [do], you will regret that."

The new troops will include two fighter squadrons, an air expeditionary wing to control fighter operations, two Army Patriot missile batteries and one Army Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, system, the Pentagon said. It did not immediately identify which units would deploy or when they would be sent to

Saudi Arabia.

The Patriot batteries join one that was sent last month to Saudi Arabia in response to the oil facility attacks. Patriot batteries typically operate six launchers that shoot defensive surface-to-air missiles designed to protect against short-range ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and aircraft. The THAAD system, also a surface-to-air defensive system, protects against short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles, destroying them as they near their target.

Esper had said previously he had placed those air defense units on prepare-to-deploy orders in the event they were deemed necessary. He said Friday he had spoken earlier with Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who had requested additional military support.

In all, Esper said he has approved an increase of about 3,000 U.S. troops in the Middle East in recent weeks, primarily to Saudi Arabia, aimed at deter-

ring Iran. He said more troops had been notified they could be deployed.

"The U.S. military has on alert additional Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force units to quickly provide increased capability in the region if necessary," he said. "... We have a full timeline of additional forces that can flow into theater. We are taking this one step at a time."

The new deployment also comes as the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier and the other ships in its strike group near the end of their planned deployment. The Lincoln, which has remained in the Middle East since it was rushed into the region after Iranian provocations in May, departed Norfolk, Va., in April, but it is scheduled in the coming weeks to head to its new homeport in San Diego.

Defense officials said Friday the aircraft carrier's deployment had not yet been extended, but they did not rule out that possibility.

Iran says missiles hit one of its tankers off Saudi Arabia

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Two missiles struck an Iranian tanker traveling through the Red Sea off the coast of Saudi Arabia on Friday, Iranian officials said, the latest incident in the region amid months of heightened tensions between Tehran and the U.S.

There was no word from Saudi Arabia on the reported attack and Saudi officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Oil prices spiked by 2% on the news.

"This latest incident, if confirmed to be an act of aggression, is highly likely to be part

of the wider narrative of deteriorating relations between Saudi and the U.S. and Iran," private maritime security firm Dryad Maritime warned. "It is likely that the region ... will face another period of increasing maritime threats, as the Iranian and Saudi geopolitical stand-off continues," it added.

Iranian state television said the explosion damaged two storerooms aboard the oil tanker and caused an oil leak into the Red Sea near the Saudi port city of Jiddah. The leak was later stopped, IRNA reported.

The state-run IRNA news agency, quoting Iran's National Iranian Tanker Co., identified

the stricken vessel as the Sabiti. It turned on its tracking devices late Friday morning in the Red Sea, putting its location some 80 miles southwest of Jiddah, according to data from MarineTraffic.com.

The ship is carrying some 1 million barrels of crude oil, according to an analysis from data firm Refinitiv.

Images released by Iran's Petroleum Ministry appeared to show no visible damage to the Sabiti visible from its bridge, though they did not show the ship's sides. Satellite images of the area showed no visible smoke.

The Sabiti last turned on

its tracking devices in August near the Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas. Iranian tankers routinely turn off their trackers as U.S. sanctions target the sale of Iran's crude oil.

"The oil tanker ... sustained damages to the body when it was hit by missiles 60 miles from the Saudi port city of Jiddah," IRNA said. The agency did not say whom Iranian officials suspect of launching the missiles.

Lt. Pete Pagano, a spokesman for the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet overseeing the Mideast, said authorities there were "aware of reports of this incident," but declined to comment further.

US warns of 'consequences' for invasion

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper “strongly encouraged” Turkey’s defense minister to stop its incursion into northeastern Syria during a call Thursday, saying the operation “risks serious consequences for Turkey,” according to a Pentagon statement released Friday.

On Tuesday, Turkey started its military action into northeast Syria to attack areas where the Syrian Democratic Forces were operating along the border with Turkey.

After the fall of the Islamic State caliphate in Syria in March, the United States kept military forces in northeast Syria to ensure that the remaining fighters in the terrorist group do not re-form. The Kurdish-led SDF was instrumental in the fight against ISIS and worked alongside U.S. forces.

During a Friday news briefing at the Pentagon, Esper denied that the U.S. had turned its back on the SDF.

“To be clear, we are not abandoning our Kurdish partner forces, and U.S. troops remain with them in other parts of Syria,” he said.

Esper told Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar during their call that the United States opposes Turkey’s “uncoordinated actions as they place at risk the progress made by the Defeat-ISIS Coalition,” according to the Pentagon statement by Chief Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman.

“While the secretary reaffirmed we value our strategic bilateral relationship, this incursion risks serious consequences for Turkey,” the statement says. “The secretary also reiterated his strong concern that, despite U.S. force protection measures, Turkey’s actions could harm U.S. personnel in Syria.”

Turkey, a NATO partner, has raised security concerns about the Syrian Kurdish forces, spe-

Turkish forces advance; number of deaths rising

Associated Press

AKCAKALE, Turkey —

Turkish forces pushed deeper into northeastern Syria on Friday, the third day of Ankara’s offensive against U.S.-allied Syrian Kurdish fighters, as casualties mounted, international criticism of the campaign intensified and thousands of civilians fled the violence.

Turkey said it captured more Kurdish-held villages in the border region, while a camp for displaced residents about 7 miles from the frontier was evacuated after artillery shells landed nearby amid intense clashes. Aid agencies have warned of a humanitarian crisis, with nearly a half-million people at risk near the border.

U.S. President Donald Trump cleared the way for Turkey’s air and ground assault after he pulled American troops from their positions near the border, drawing swift bipartisan criticism that he was endangering regional stability and abandoning Syrian Kurdish forces that brought down Islamic State in Syria.

Trump has warned Turkey to act with moderation and safeguard civilians, and the Pentagon said the operation is a threat to progress in combatting ISIS militants and a potential threat to U.S. troops in Syria.

Plumes of black smoke bil-

lowed Friday from the Syrian border town of Tal Abyad as Turkey continued bombarding the area in an offensive that was progressing “successfully as planned,” the Turkish Defense Ministry said.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has said the military intends to move 19 miles into northern Syria and that its operation will last until all “terrorists are neutralized.” NATO member Turkey considers the Syrian Kurdish fighters to be terrorists linked to a Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey and says the offensive is a counterterrorism operation necessary for its own national security.

The Defense Ministry statement reported the death of two Turkish soldiers, with three wounded, but did not give details. Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said 342 “terrorists” — Ankara’s term for Syrian Kurdish militiamen — have been killed so far. The figure could not be independently verified. Syrian activists say only eight fighters were killed.

The Kurdish militia has fired dozens of mortars into border towns inside Turkey in the past two days, including Akcakale, according to officials in two provinces on the Turkish side.

Specifically the YPG forces, near its border. Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan told President Donald Trump during a phone call Sunday that he was going to conduct an operation in that area.

Trump responded, saying the U.S. would pull its forces from key posts in northern Syria. The SDF immediately condemned the decision, saying that they would defend themselves against a Turkish attack.

Esper denied that the U.S.

“greenlighted” Turkey’s incursion.

“Just the opposite,” he said Friday. “We pushed back very hard at all levels for the Turks not to commence this operation.”

In Thursday’s call, Esper “strongly encouraged Turkey to discontinue actions in northeastern Syria” so that they could “deescalate the situation before it becomes irreparable.”

Trump told reporters Thursday at the White House that he hoped the U.S., Turkey and the Syrian Kurds could mediate the situation.

“So what we have is really two choices: You have the choice of bringing in the military and defeating everybody again, or you have the choice of financially doing some very strong things to Turkey ... We have a very good relationship with the Kurds. Or we can mediate ... I hope we can mediate,” he said.

Even with calls to Turkey’s defense minister about opposition to the operation, Esper said Friday, “I have yet no indication that they are willing to stop.”

The U.S. has coordinated with Turkey’s military where American forces remain in Syria in order to protect them, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters Friday.

“Everyone is fully aware that we are the United States military, we retain the right of self-defense. And our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines will defend themselves,” he said. “That’s clear, and it’s unambiguous with anybody.”

The White House is putting Turkey on notice that it could face new “powerful sanctions” and that the U.S. will “shut down the Turkish economy” if Ankara goes too far in its incursion against the Kurds in northern Syria.

Later on Friday, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said at the White House the U.S. hopes it will not have to use its new, expanded sanctions authority Trump has authorized.

Ex-envoy defies Trump, testifies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch appeared on Capitol Hill Friday for a deposition in the Democrats' impeachment inquiry, accepting lawmakers' invitation to testify despite President Donald Trump's declaration that his administration wouldn't cooperate with the probe.

Yovanovitch was recalled from her post in May and is now a State Department fellow at Georgetown University. Trump said earlier this week that he would block all officials from testifying, saying the probe was unfair and "illegitimate." It's unclear if Yovanovitch's appearance signals a shift in that strategy or if she is breaking with White House policy.

Democrats are investigating Trump's pleas to Ukrainian officials to launch investigations of political rival Joe Biden and his family. Yovanovitch was recalled from Kyiv in May as Rudy Giuliani — who is Trump's personal attorney and has no official role in the U.S. government — pushed Ukrainian officials to investigate baseless corruption allegations against the Bidens.

Yovanovitch was removed from her post after insisting that Giuliani's requests to Ukrainian officials for investigations be relayed through official channels, according to a former diplomat.

In a July 25 phone call, Trump told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that Yovanovitch was "bad news," according to a partial transcript released by the White House.

Businessmen with ties to Giuliani lobbied a U.S. congressman in 2018 for help ousting Yovanovitch, according to an indictment made public Thursday following the men's arrest. It alleges that the men leveraged a flurry of GOP political donations to force Yovanovitch's removal.

The former diplomat who spoke with Yovanovitch said the ambassador refused to do "all this offline, personal, informal stuff" and made clear that the U.S. government had formal ways to request foreign governments' help with investigations. The former diplomat insisted on anonymity to disclose the private conversation.

The State Department traditionally relies on mutual legal assistance treaties,

under which U.S. and foreign officials agree to exchange evidence and information in criminal investigations.

Yovanovitch was to speak to the House Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Oversight and Reform committees behind closed doors Friday. The committees are scheduled to talk to several other U.S. diplomats next week, as well.

On Monday, Fiona Hill, a former White House adviser who focused on Russia, is expected to testify. Three current State Department officials also are tentatively scheduled next week — Deputy Assistant Secretary of State George Kent, U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon Sondland, and Ulrich Brechbuhl, a State Department counselor.

Sondland was originally scheduled for a deposition this past Tuesday but did not show up. Trump tweeted afterward that he couldn't let Sondland testify because the Democratic-led probe was "compromised."

The committees subpoenaed Sondland hours later for a deposition next week, and his attorneys said Friday he would testify.

Appeals court rules House should get Trump financials

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court ruled Friday that President Donald Trump's financial records must be turned over to the House of Representatives.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said that lawmakers should get the documents they have subpoenaed from Mazars USA. The firm has provided accounting services to Trump.

Trump went to court to prevent Mazars from turning over the records. He could appeal to the Supreme Court.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., chairman of the House committee that is seeking the records, called for prompt compliance. "After months of delay, it is time for the President to stop blocking Mazars from complying with the Committee's lawful subpoena," Cum-

mings said in a statement.

The House Committee on Oversight and Reform subpoenaed records from Mazars in April.

They include documents from 2011 to 2018 that the House wants for investigation into the president's reporting of his finances and potential conflicts of interest. The list of documents makes no mention of Trump's tax returns.

In a 2-1 ruling, the appeals court batted away Trump's legal claims.

"Contrary to the President's arguments, the Committee possesses authority under both the House Rules and the Constitution to issue the subpoena, and Mazars must comply," Judge David Tatel wrote, joined by Judge Patricia Millett.

Tatel was appointed by President Bill Clinton. Millett is an appointee of President Barack Obama.

Trump slams impeachment probe, Biden at Minn. rally

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — President Donald Trump was defiant in the face of an impeachment probe as he sought to convert the threat to his presidency into a weapon on the campaign trail, with biting and unsupported attacks on potential Democratic challenger Joe Biden.

Confronting an investigation provoked by his unprecedented calls for Ukraine and then China to assist in digging up dirt on his political rivals, Trump continued to lay into Biden and his son Hunter, whom he and his allies have accused of illegally profiting off his father's office.

"The Bidens got rich, and that is substantiated, while America got robbed," Trump said. While the young Biden did have business interest overseas while he father was in office, there is no evidence of misconduct.

Trump's adult children have faced congressional scrutiny for their foreign business dealings while their father is serving as president, and Trump still maintains ownership stakes in his family's businesses.

The rally in Minneapolis, the first since Democrats began proceedings two weeks ago to remove him from office, served as a proving ground for the president as he tries to use the impeachment inquiry to energize supporters for his 2020 campaign by casting himself — and his supporters — as victims of Washington Democrats.

The performance revealed a defense strategy largely detached from the allegations Trump faces.

"They want to erase your vote like it never existed," Trump said. "They want to erase your voice, and they want to erase your future."

Wildfires rage along northern edge of LA

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A wildfire raged out of control along the northern edge of Los Angeles early Friday, forcing thousands of people from their homes as firefighters battled flames from the air and on the ground.

Police Chief Michel Moore said mandatory evacuations encompassed about 100,000 people in over 20,000 homes.

Fire Chief Ralph Terrazas said the fire had grown to more than 7 square miles and at least 25 homes had been damaged. A middle-aged man who was near where the fire was burning went into cardiac arrest and died, the chief said, but he did not have details.

The blaze erupted around 9 p.m. Thurs-

day along the northern tier of the San Fernando Valley as powerful Santa Ana winds swept through Southern California.

Terrazas said there were sustained winds of 20-25 mph with gusts over 50 mph and relative humidity levels had fallen as low as 3%.

“As you can imagine the embers from the wind have been traveling a significant distance which causes another fire to start,” Terrazas said.

The fire erupted in Sylmar, the northernmost portion of the valley, and spread westward at a rate of 800 acres an hour into Porter Ranch, part of a so-called urban-wildland interface where subdivisions crowd against the foothills of the Santa Susana Mountains. The cause wasn’t im-

mediately known.

Helicopters made repeated water drops as crews in Los Angeles attacked flames in and around homes. Water- and retardant-dropping airplanes joined the battle after daybreak. About 1,000 firefighters were on the lines.

Edwin Bernard, 73, said he and his wife were forced to leave their four cats behind as they fled their Sylmar home.

“The fireman said, ‘go, go, go!’” Bernard said. “It was a whole curtain of fire. There was fire on all sides. We had to leave.”

Evacuations were also still in effect in the inland region east of Los Angeles where a fire erupted Thursday and raged through a mobile home park in the Calimesa area of Riverside County.

Ethiopia PM Abiy awarded Nobel Peace Prize

Associated Press

OSLO, Norway — Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2019 in recognition of his efforts to end his country’s two-decade border conflict with Eritrea.

The Norwegian Nobel Institute on Friday also praised the “important reforms” that Abiy, Ethiopia’s leader since April 2018, has launched at home. The prize comes as Abiy faces pressure to uphold the sweeping freedoms he introduced, and critics warn that his ability to deal with rising domestic unrest may be slipping.

The Nobel committee said some people may consider it too early to give him the prize, but “it is now that Abiy Ahmed’s efforts need recognition and deserve

encouragement.”

The award reflects the committee’s taste for trying to encourage works in progress.

“We are proud as a nation!!!” Abiy’s office said in a tweet.

Nobel Institute director Olav Njoelstad, said he had been in touch by phone with Abiy, who “showed great humility and was overwhelmed.”

Abiy, 43, took office after widespread protests pressured the longtime ruling coalition and hurt one of the world’s fastest growing economies. Africa’s youngest leader quickly announced dramatic reforms and “Abiymania” began.

On taking office, Abiy surprised people by fully accepting a peace deal ending a 20-year border war between the two East

African nations that saw tens of thousands of people killed. Ethiopia and Eritrea had not had diplomatic ties since the war began in 1998, with Abiy himself once fighting in a town that remained contested at the time of his announcement last year.

Within weeks, the visibly moved Eritrean president, Isaias Afwerki, visited Addis Ababa and communications and transport links were restored.

For the first time in two decades, long-divided families made tearful reunions.

The improving relations led to the lifting of United Nations sanctions on Eritrea, one of the world’s most reclusive nations. But Ethiopia’s reforms do not appear to have inspired any in Eritrea, which has since closed border posts with its neighbor.

El Paso shooting suspect pleads not guilty in 22 deaths

Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — The man charged with capital murder in the fatal shooting of 22 people at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, pleaded not guilty Thursday during a brief initial hearing.

Police have said Patrick Crusius, 21, of Dallas confessed to the Aug. 3 mass shooting and that he targeted Mexicans. Some two-dozen people survived the attack with injuries, and two of them remain in the hospital, according to hospital officials.

Crusius walked into the courtroom wearing a dark suit, white shirt and glasses. He was sworn in, waived the reading of his in-

dictment and pleaded not guilty. The entire hearing lasted less than three minutes.

About 80 members of the public crammed into the courtroom on the top floor of the El Paso County Courthouse to witness his first appearance.

A handful wiped away tears as Crusius pronounced his plea.

Among the crowd was a delegation from the Mexican Consulate. Eight Mexican citizens were killed in the attack, and most of the victims had Hispanic last names. Among the dead was a German citizen who lived in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

A bailiff had asked the court to remain quiet and warned against outbursts.

Local prosecutors have said they will seek the death penalty. Federal authorities are weighing capital murder and hate crime charges. The Department of Justice has called the shooting an act of domestic terrorism.

There were 2,000 witnesses at the scene of the massacre, so almost everybody in the city of about 700,000 knew somebody affected by the shooting.

The first judge assigned to the case recused herself because she knew one of the people killed in the attack. The lead prosecutor said his sister also was in the Walmart during the attack and that the gunman walked right by her.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

City plants flags in abandoned dog poop

MO SPRINGFIELD — Officials in a southwest Missouri city are planting small flags in piles of abandoned dog poop as part of a campaign to get residents to clean up after their pets.

The Police Department in Springfield posted photos of the flags in use on its Facebook page Wednesday.

The flags contain messages such as, “Is this your turd? ‘Cuz that’s absurd” and “This is a nudge to pick up the fudge.”

The campaign started this week and the department noted on Facebook that leaving behind a pet’s mess in many cases violates a city ordinance.

Parking lot at Mormon church covered in beer

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Cans of beer have littered the parking lot of a church of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a Salt Lake City suburb after a semi-trailer crashed that was carrying cases of brew banned by the faith.

Sandy Police Sgt. Jason Nielsen said the semitrailer veered and fell from a road and into the church’s parking lot after it was hit by a pickup truck that ran a red light on Thursday. Beer cans were strewn across the empty church parking lot.

Among the faith’s rules is a ban on members drinking alcohol.

Official: Children using lighter start motel fire

TX SPRING — Fire investigators said two young children who were left alone in a suburban Houston motel room were playing with a lighter that caused a three-

alarm fire, resulting in minor injuries to seven people.

Rachel Moreno, spokeswoman for the Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office, said Thursday that the two children, siblings who are 3 and 6 years old, were among the seven transported for evaluation.

Moreno said witnesses reported they saw the children holding a lighter while running from a room Wednesday at the Motel 6 North about 20 miles north of Houston. She said their mother had hired a baby sitter to watch the children but the sitter left the room for a time.

Victim of dog attack: Don’t blame dogs

CT PLYMOUTH — A Connecticut woman recovering in the hospital after being attacked by four of her own large French mastiffs said she doesn’t blame the dogs.

Patricia Collins, 45, told the (Waterbury) Republican-American in a phone interview Wednesday from Yale New Haven Hospital she doesn’t know what triggered the attack but reiterated that it wasn’t the dogs’ fault. She was to have surgery Thursday to treat injuries to her arm and abdomen.

The Plymouth woman was attacked by four of her six French mastiffs on Monday afternoon.

Officers responding to a 911 call found her on the rear patio of a neighbor’s house. Police shot and killed three of the dogs. The fourth was injured and taken to a veterinary hospital, but was euthanized.

Man accused of forcing alligator to drink beer

FL PALM CITY — Authorities said they’ve arrested a Florida man who provoked a small alligator into biting his arm and poured beer into the animal’s mouth.

News outlets report Timothy Kepke, 27, and Noah Osborne, 22, were charged last week with unlawfully taking an alligator.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission officers began investigating in August following a complaint of Osborne catching the alligator in Palm City and handing it to Kepke. Kepke appears in a video to let the reptile bite his forearm. The video also shows Kepke feeding the alligator beer as it struggles.

When officers interviewed Kepke last month, he reportedly acknowledged that he was in the video and said the gator was alive when they released it.

Hotel clerk grabs gun after thief sets it down

KY PADUCAH — A Kentucky hotel clerk forced a thief out of her workplace by grabbing a gun he set down on the check-in counter while stuffing cash into a bag.

Security video obtained by news outlets shows an armed man with his face covered, demanding money from an employee at a Country Inn and Suites on Monday. In the video, she can be seen handing over bills as the suspect sets his gun down to collect them. That’s when the clerk grabs the gun and turns it on him.

The man tries hopping over the counter to reclaim the weapon but the employee continues pointing it at him until he flees into a waiting car.

Police are investigating and have asked for the public’s help identifying the suspect.

School evacuated over smoldering laptop

NC LEWISVILLE — Officials said an overheated and smoldering 2015 Chromebook caused about 600 children to be evacuated from

a school, whose district is now recalling about \$4.2 million dollars’ worth of district-issued laptops.

Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools’ chief technology officer, Kevin Sherrill, said Wednesday the children were evacuated that morning after the laptop began to smoke.

District spokesman Brent Campbell said a Lewisville Elementary third grader reported the laptop was getting hot, and it then started to smoke. He said the classroom and building were evacuated, and the laptop was sprayed with a fire extinguisher.

Sherrill said the laptop likely suffered a battery-related issue. The district is now recalling all 20,000 of its 2015 Chromebooks, which Sherrill said are each valued at about \$210.

Officials say elk hunt is likely in 2020

MO SPRINGFIELD — Missouri Department of Conservation officials said the state’s elk herd is on track to be large enough in 2020 for the first hunt in more than a century.

The Springfield News-Leader reported that department officials outlined how a hunt will work if the rules get final approval by the conservation commission. Five to 10 permits are likely to be available and only Missouri residents will be eligible, officials said during a Wednesday webcast.

Department elk specialist Aaron Hildreth said the elk that were reintroduced to Missouri in 2011 now number about 175 and the herd is expected to be close to 200 animals by fall 2020. The department hopes to grow the herd to 400 to 500 elk and more hunting permits will likely become available in future years.

From wire reports

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Astros win Game 5, advance to ALCS

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Gerrit Cole pitched yet another playoff masterpiece and the Houston Astros jumped to a quick lead, turning back the Tampa Bay Rays 6-1 Thursday night in Game 5 to set up a titanic showdown with the New York Yankees in the AL Championship Series.

After fellow aces Zack Greinke and Justin Verlander were unable to close out the scrappy Rays on the road, Cole made sure Houston moved on. Given a 4-0 cushion in the first inning, he dominated through the eighth in the decisive game of the AL Division Series, striking out 10 and allowing just two hits.

On deck, the heavyweight matchup so many fans wanted to see: Jose Altuve and the 107-win Astros against Aaron Judge and the 103-win Yankees. Game 1 is Saturday night in Houston — the Astros won four of seven meetings this season.

Michael Brantley and Altuve put the finishing touches on this victory, hitting back-to-back home runs in the eighth.

The Astros advanced to their third straight ALCS, and are aiming for their second World Series crown in that span.

Houston beat the Yankees in a seven-game ALCS on the way to its first championship in 2017. The Astros also won the 2015 AL wild-card game at Yankee Stadium.

The Rays beat Oakland in the AL wild-card game, then took the last two against the Astros to extend their first playoff run since 2013.

But facing Cole, they were in trouble — especially after Altuve, Alex Bregman and the Astros scored four times in the first against Tyler Glasnow.

Cole followed his 15-strikeout gem in a Game 2 win with another overpowering effort. The right-hander, who grew up a Yankees fan and was originally drafted by them but didn't sign, improved to 18-0 in his last 24 starts.

Cole topped the majors with 326 strikeouts this season, led the AL with a 2.50 ERA and posted 20 wins, one behind Verlander for most in the big leagues.

The 29-year-old struck out the first two batters in the eighth before Willy Adames grounded out to end Cole's night. He beat his chest once before walking to the dugout to a huge ovation from the rowdy sellout crowd of 43,418 at Minute Maid Park.

After winning an MLB-best and franchise-record 107 games in the regular season, the Astros were determined not to suffer the same fate as the Dodgers, winners of 106 games, who were ousted from the playoffs by the wild-card Nationals on Wednesday night.

Houston had been outscored 14-4 in the last two games, but looked sharp at home, where it went 60-21 in the regular season.

A day after the Cardinals scored a postseason-record 10 runs in the first inning of a 13-1 win over the Braves, the Astros scored four runs fast. Now, it wasn't nearly as big as what St. Louis did, but after the Astros were shut down at Tropicana Field, it was just as huge for them.

The Astros will make their seventh appearance in an LCS and are the first team to reach

the ALCS three seasons in a row since the Detroit Tigers did it from 2011-13.

Altuve's shot gave him 11 postseason homers to pass Chase Utley for most all-time by a second baseman.

Cole extended his major league record by striking out at least 10 batters for the 11th straight game, a stretch where he's fanned 135.

Cole pitched a 1-2-3 third but didn't strike anyone out in the frame, ending a streak of 73 consecutive innings with at least one strikeout. The streak, which dated back to Aug. 1, was the longest such streak since 1961, besting the second-best stretch by 33 innings.

George Springer and Brantley hit back-to-back singles and Altuve's single made it 1-0. Bregman's double, which landed just in front of the bullpen in right-center, scored two more to push the lead to 3-0.

Yuli Gurriel's groundball single to left field added another. Houston's five hits and four runs set franchise playoff records for most hits and runs in the first inning.

Patriots pull away from Giants, remain undefeated

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Under coach Bill Belichick, the Patriots have made a habit of besting young quarterbacks.

They can add Giants rookie Daniel Jones to that list.

Tom Brady had two touchdown runs and moved ahead of Peyton Manning for second place on the NFL's all-time passing yards list as New England pulled away for a 35-14 victory over the New York Giants on Thursday night.

The reigning Super Bowl champion Patriots also returned a blocked punt for a touchdown and forced four turnovers, including a fumble return for a score, to move to 6-0 for the first time since time since 2015.

Brady finished 31-for-41 for 334 yards and an interception. Julian Edelman had his second straight 100-yard receiving game, catching nine passes for 113 yards. Jones had three interceptions on the night, finishing 15-for-31 for 161 yards.

New England has now won 19 straight games against a first- or second-year quarterback, the longest such streak in NFL history.

"It was kind of an odd game, anytime you get three scores in the game that are non-offensive touchdowns," Belichick said. "That's kind of a season's worth and it all happened in one game."

The Patriots did it without running back Rex Burkhead, who missed his second straight game with a foot injury. Receiver Phillip Dorsett was inactive with a hamstring issue. During the game, receiver Josh Gordon injured his left knee trying to make a tackle after a fumble recovery.

"Guys just kind of filled in," Brady said. "We knew we weren't gonna have Phillip tonight. ... Then Josh got hurt. Just kind of dealing with kind of what everyone else deals with this time of year. Lots of injuries and attrition and so forth. But was a good win."

Despite struggling to move the ball for most of the game, New York (2-4) had the ball trailing 21-14 with 8:43 left in the fourth quarter.

Jones completed a pass to running back Jon Hilliman, who was hit in the backfield by Patriots linebacker Jamie

Collins, forcing a fumble. Kyle Van Noy recovered, sprinted 22 yards and stretched the ball to the pylon for the touchdown.

It was part of an error-filled game by both offenses.

Like the Patriots, the Giants were missing some of their playmakers. Running back Saquon Barkley sat a third straight game because of a sprained right ankle, tight end Evan Engram sat with a knee injury and receiver Sterling Shepard was in the concussion protocol.

As a result, both teams had issues executing and hanging onto the ball.

Jones was confused at times by the Patriots' coverages, contributing to his turnovers. And Brady had a fumble that was returned for a touchdown.

Five things to know

Florida-LSU heads high-profile games

Associated Press

Life as a Southeastern Conference title contender means you have a chance to make a statement every week but rarely get a chance to breathe.

Consider the stretch No. 7 Florida is facing now.

Florida won one matchup of unbeaten teams last week with a 24-13 victory over Auburn that dropped the Tigers from seventh to 12th in the Top 25. Now the Gators get another undefeated team, this time on the road against No. 5 LSU under the lights in Baton Rouge.

The Florida-LSU showdown headlines a week full of high-profile pairings. Other matchups of Top 25 teams have No. 6 Oklahoma facing No. 11 Texas, Alabama visiting No. 24 Texas A&M and No. 17 Iowa hosting No. 10 Penn State. And that doesn't even include No. 9 Notre Dame's rivalry renewal with unranked Southern California.

Game of the week

Florida (6-0, 3-0 SEC) at LSU (5-0, 1-0)

LSU has the nation's highest-scoring offense, while Florida offers one of college football's most fearsome defenses. This game could come

down to how well Jon Greenard and his Florida teammates pressure LSU quarterback Joe Burrow.

Heisman watch

A few of the nation's top quarterbacks face their toughest challenges of the season in a week that could narrow down the Heisman Trophy race.

Burrow faces a Florida team that leads all Football Bowl Subdivision teams with 12 interceptions and is tied for third nationally with 26 sacks. Burrow leads the nation in completion percentage (.784) and ranks second in passing yards per game (372.8) and third in passing efficiency.

Oklahoma's Jalen Hurts leads the nation in passing efficiency and has rushed for 499 yards, but he could have a much tougher time this week against Texas, the first Top 25 opponent on the sixth-ranked Sooners' schedule.

Alabama's Tua Tagovailoa has thrown 23 touchdown passes without an interception this year after finishing second in last season's Heisman balloting. Alabama faces its first ranked opponent Saturday at Texas A&M.

Numbers game

1 — No. 3 Georgia has allowed

only one sack all season. The Bulldogs also are the only FBS team that hasn't given up a single touchdown run all year.

4 — No. 8 Wisconsin, No. 10 Penn State, No. 3 Ohio State and No. 17 Iowa give the Big Ten the nation's four top-scoring defenses. Wisconsin has allowed an FBS-low 5.8 points per game. The Badgers are followed by Penn State (7.4), Iowa (8.8) and Ohio State (8.8).

6 — No. 19 Wake Forest is seeking its first 6-0 start since 1944 when it hosts Louisville this week. The Demon Deacons started 7-0 in 1944 and went on to finish 8-1. Wake Forest currently is 5-0 for just the fourth time ever, joining the 1944, 1987 and 2006 squads.

23 — Oklahoma has scored at least one touchdown in 23 consecutive quarters, a streak that started late last season.

26 — No. 2 Clemson has played an FBS-leading 26 consecutive games without allowing a player to rush for 100 yards. Clemson puts that streak on the line Saturday as it attempts to slow down Florida State's Cam Akers, whose 582 yards rushing rank second in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Under the radar

Hawaii (4-1, 1-0 Mountain West)

at No. 14 Boise State (5-0, 2-0): Hawaii is coming off a 52-3 blowout at Nevada and now faces a major nemesis. Boise State has beaten Hawaii six straight times and has won each of the last five meetings by at least 35 points.

Wyoming (4-1, 1-0 Mountain West) at San Diego State (4-1, 1-1): Wyoming ranks 14th nationally in rushing. San Diego State leads all FBS teams in run defense.

No. 23 Memphis (5-0, 1-0 American Athletic Conference) at Temple (4-1, 1-0): This game features two talented young running backs in Memphis redshirt freshman Kenneth Gainwell (76 carries, 620 yards, 6 TDs) and Temple true freshman Re'Mahn Davis (84-503-4).

Hot seat watch

Southern California coach Clay Helton has plenty at stake Saturday when his Trojans (3-2) visit Notre Dame (4-1).

Helton occupied arguably the hottest seat in college football heading into the season. USC has produced some impressive wins over Utah and Stanford this year while dealing with quarterback injuries, but a loss to Notre Dame would drop the Trojans to the .500 mark at the midway point of the season. That's not good enough at USC.

Defense notches 8 sacks as NC State edges Syracuse

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — The sacks kept coming, one after another, for North Carolina State's defense all the way to the finish Thursday night.

The Wolfpack battered Tommy DeVito for eight sacks, the last coming from Larrell Murchison in the final seconds to seal a 16-10 win Thursday night.

The Wolfpack (4-2, 1-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) led all night and by as much as 16-0 in the third quarter before having to come up with a final stop to maintain their hold on the

win. Fittingly, it came on the play that the Wolfpack made a habit in this one, with Murchison dragging down DeVito on a third down that left the Orange (3-3, 0-2) frantically trying to get another snap off against a dwindling clock with no timeouts.

Instead, they were flagged for a false-start penalty with 2 seconds left, prompting a clock runoff that ended it.

"I thought we showed a lot of stamina at the end, getting that sack to close out the game," Wolfpack coach Dave Doeren said. "The defensive staff I

thought really put together a great game plan and the kids executed it well."

Going back to an eight-sack effort in the last game against Florida State, N.C. State now has a program-record 16 sacks over consecutive games. That surpassed the previous mark of 14 against Virginia and North Carolina in 1982.

That's a pretty good early return on a move to a 3-3-5 defensive scheme, while linebacker Louis Acceus also credited defensive coordinator Dave Huxtable's work.

"It's all Coach Hux and his

crazy scheming, these blitzes he's drawing up," said Acceus, who had three sacks. "Everybody's crossing here, crossing there, crossing there, and somebody's going to end up open."

DeVito managed to stay upright to the end despite the constant pressure, connecting with Trishton Jackson for a 2-yard touchdown with 3 minutes left. Then the Orange forced an immediate three-and-out to get the ball back with the chance to win, though it ultimately only set up the Wolfpack's final stat-padding takedown.

Mystics top Sun, capture WNBA crown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Elena Delle Donne and the Washington Mystics capped an eventful WNBA season with the team's first championship.

A year that began with the league missing some of its top players because of injuries and rest ended with a compelling five-game championship series.

Delle Donne battled through injuries all season, a broken nose early on and then three

herniated disks in her back in the Finals. None of it mattered. She wouldn't be denied her first title.

"To be on a team that could carry me when I wasn't 100 percent really means a lot to just get over this hump and to be able to push through when not feeling great," she said.

It wasn't easy.

"It took five games, took four in the semis, it took battling injuries, it took a lot of resilience, fight, heart," said Kristi Toliver, the only Mystics

player to win a WNBA title before Thursday night. "We had the biggest heart all year, and we were the most focused and determined team all year, and we're just really proud of what we've done. But last year obviously certainly motivated us to be really, really focused for the season."

It helped that Finals MVP Emma Meesseman was back after missing last year to play with the Belgian national team.

"I don't think I'm the missing

piece. I'm their teammate (and did what) I need to do to help my team win a championship. This is my family right here," said Meesseman, who scored 22 points in Washington's 89-78 victory over the Connecticut Sun on Thursday night.

It was a fitting conclusion to an entertaining series and WNBA season. This was the seventh series in league history that had gone to a deciding Game 5, and the home team has won five of them.

NHL roundup

Guentzel, Penguins knock Ducks from ranks of unbeaten

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Jake Guentzel has played with Sidney Crosby long enough to know he needs to get to the net when he sees Pittsburgh's captain take a defenseman wide.

Guentzel was at the right place when he scored the tie-breaking goal in the third period to lead the Penguins to a 2-1 victory over the previously unbeaten Anaheim Ducks on Thursday night.

Guentzel finished Crosby's backhand feed from the slot at 7:24 of the third.

"You're just so used to it now," Guentzel said. "With the strength he has, you just kind of think he'll get by the defenseman. He comes in, beats a guy and then makes a great play, not really looking. It's just a special play and I was happy to be on the end of it."

Guentzel has five goals in five career games against the Ducks, including his second career hat trick last season.

Crosby also scored a power-play goal, his second of the season. Crosby, who opened the season on a four-game point streak, has multiple points in five of his last 10 games against Anaheim.

Matt Murray made 31 saves for the Penguins. He needs one

more win to reach 100 in the NHL.

Red Wings 4, Canadiens 2: Anthony Mantha scored his sixth goal of the season and visiting Detroit snapped a nine-game losing streak against Montreal.

Darren Helm, Tyler Bertuzzi and Luke Glendinning also scored for the Red Wings, who have three wins in four games this season.

Lightning 7, Maple Leafs 3: Nikita Kucherov scored twice and finished with four points, Brayden Point had two goals and an assist in his season debut and visiting Tampa Bay beat Toronto.

Steven Stamkos added a goal and three assists and Ondrej Palat also scored for Tampa Bay.

Oilers 4, Devils 3 (SO): Leon Draisaitl scored the only goal in the shootout to give undefeated visiting Edmonton a victory over winless New Jersey.

Draisaitl, who also scored in regulation, connected in the third round of the shootout as the Oilers improved to 4-0-0.

Blues 6, Senators 4: David Perron's second goal of the game proved to be the winner as visiting St. Louis beat Ottawa.

Oskar Sundqvist, Jay Bouwmeester and Brayden Schenn

also scored for the Blues. Ryan O'Reilly had a goal and three assists and Jake Allen made 25 saves in his season debut.

Jets 5, Wild 2: Patrik Laine scored twice and added a pair of assists as host Winnipeg beat Minnesota.

Laine set up Kyle Connor's third-period goal that broke a 2-2 tie, giving the Finnish shooter the lead in team points with 10 (three goals and seven assists).

Predators 6, Capitals 5: Mattias Ekholm scored with 4:40 remaining to cap a wild third period and lead host Nashville past Washington.

Ryan Johansen scored twice and Filip Forsberg, Matt Duchene and Nick Bonino added goals for Nashville, which finished 3-1 on a season-opening, four-game homestand.

Sharks 5, Blackhawks 4: Patrick Marleau scored two goals in his first game back with his former team, and visiting San Jose earned its first win of the season.

Barclay Goodrow snapped a third-period tie and Brent Burns scored his 200th career goal for San Jose, which opened with four consecutive losses. Kevin Labanc also scored, and Dylan Gambrell had two assists.

Flames 3, Stars 2 (SO): Johnny Gaudreau put a back-

hand past Dallas goalie Ben Bishop in a shootout and visiting Calgary beat Dallas.

Tyler Seguin was the only one of three Stars who beat Calgary goalie David Rittich in the shootout. It was tied 1-1, with Sean Monahan beating Bishop before Gaudreau won the game on the last attempt in the first round.

Avalanche 4, Bruins 2: Andre Burakovsky scored the go-ahead goal with 7:06 remaining and unbeaten host Colorado handed Boston its first loss of the season.

Gabriel Landeskog added an empty-net goal with 1:01 remaining for the Avalanche, who are off to a 3-0 start for just the second time since relocating to Denver from Quebec in 1995. The 2013-14 club opened the season 6-0.

Coyotes 4, Golden Knights 1: Conor Garland scored twice, Nick Schmaltz and Niklas Hjalmarsson scored and host Arizona beat Vegas for its first win of the season.

The Coyotes (1-2-0) broke out of a scoring slump after managing just one goal in the first two games. Darcy Kuemper made 36 saves in his third consecutive start to open the season, and new center Carl Soderberg added two assists.