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Esper lashes out over Turkish assault

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — After spending four tumultuous days engulfed in the chaotic ramifications of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper lashed out Thursday at Turkey for its military assault across the border on Syrian Kurdish fighters.

Speaking at the German Marshall Fund, Esper said Turkey's "unwarranted" invasion into Syria jeopardizes gains made there in recent years as the U.S.-led coalition and allied Syrian Kurdish forces battled Islamic State.

"Turkey put us all in a very terrible situation. I think the incursion was unwarranted," he said. "I think President (Recep Tayyip) Erdogan was fixated on making this incursion for one reason or another and there was not a possibility

that we were going to start a war with a NATO ally."

He said Turkey is heading in the wrong direction, spinning closer to Russia, adding, "I think that is unfortunate and I think we all need to work together to strengthen our partnership with Turkey and make sure they trend back to being the strong, reliable ally, responsible ally that they've been in the past."

His comments come on the heels of President Donald Trump's announcement Wednesday that the U.S. is lifting sanctions on Turkey after the NATO ally agreed to permanently stop fighting Kurdish forces in Syria. And he spoke just a day after he was in Iraq to discuss the withdrawal and the ISIS threat with Iraqi leaders and his military commanders.

Trump is defending his decision to withdraw about 1,000

American troops from Syria, largely abandoning the Syrian Kurdish fighters who battled ISIS alongside the U.S. for the last several years.

Trump has declared victory, saying the move is saving lives, but it also cedes control of a large swath of the border to Turkey, Russia and the Syrian government.

Trump has agreed that 200 to 300 U.S. troops will remain at the Al Tanf garrison in southern Syria. And Esper has said the U.S. is still discussing a plan that would leave another small residual force in eastern Syria, near oil facilities that are under the control of the SDF. Those troops would help secure the oil from ISIS.

Esper was expected to meet with Turkey's defense minister, Hulusi Akar, at the meeting of NATO defense chiefs Thursday. In previous discussions, Esper

and other U.S. leaders were unable to convince Turkey to not invade Syria to push back Syrian Kurdish fighters whom Ankara considers terrorists.

Esper's stop in Brussels for the NATO meeting and speech caps a six-day trip that included his first visits as secretary to the two major warzones where U.S. troops are deployed — Iraq and Afghanistan. He also spent several days in Saudi Arabia.

In his speech, Esper repeated familiar warnings about the increasing threats from China and Russia. He said China is trying to reshape the world in its favor, and is using its power to impact other nations' economies and political decisions.

Other nations, he said, must enter their relationships with China with open eyes, and be aware of its militarization of the South China Sea and ongoing thefts of intellectual property.

Spencer defends USS Ford after criticisms

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— Navy Secretary Richard Spencer on Wednesday called Rep. Elaine Luria's criticisms about the delays affecting the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier "disparaging" and not helpful.

"I look at her and other leadership on [Capitol] Hill who continually disparaged the Ford as a program, and I get a little upset," he said during a discussion at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank. "You could not ask for a better disinformation program for our competitors. And I truly mean that."

Tuesday during a House

Armed Services Committee subpanel on readiness hearing, Luria, D-Va., questioned the Ford's costs and delays, including the ship's troubled elevators.

She called the Ford — the newest aircraft carrier being constructed by the Navy — "a nuclear-powered floating berthing barge that's not deployable because of the aircraft elevators and the yet untested dual-band radar, catapults and arresting gear."

On Wednesday, Luria issued a statement responding to Spencer's comments. She pointed out that Spencer had made a promise to President Donald Trump in January that

the weapons elevators on the Ford would be functioning by the end of summer, but they still are not.

"I find it disappointing that the secretary finds congressional oversight disparaging," Luria said in the prepared statement. "I have yet to see a detailed plan to fix the multitude of problems with these new technologies. The Navy accepted the design of these systems and accepted the ship in an incomplete state ... so it is absolutely my role to question Navy leadership on their current failure to deliver an operational ship to the fleet."

About \$13 billion has been invested in the ship, according to Luria. The ship's 11 weapons

elevators, which are needed to load ordnance on planes, have been a problem for years. The Navy commissioned the ship in July 2017 without any working elevators. The ship's electromagnetic catapult system for launching aircraft has also faced issues.

Vice Adm. Thomas Moore, commander of Naval Sea Systems Command, said during the Tuesday hearing that the Ford was originally planned to be delivered in 2013 and deployed in 2018.

"And best estimates, we're looking at 2024?," Luria asked Moore about the Ford's deployment.

"I think we'll beat that," Moore replied.

Turkish-Kurdish clashes persist

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Turkish forces and their allies attacked Syrian government troops in northeastern Syria on Thursday, killing some of them, and they also clashed with Kurdish-led fighters, the state news agency in Damascus and a war monitoring group said.

The fighting underscored the risks of violence as multiple and often opposing armed forces jostle for new positions in the tight quarters of the northeastern border zone.

Most worrisome has been the prospect of a collision between forces of the Syrian government and those backed by Turkey, which include Syrian rebel fighters and Islamic extremists opposed to President Bashar Assad.

All sides have said they are abiding by a cease-fire as they implement a Russian-Turkish agreement that divides up the border region. But frictions could undermine the effort for a resolution on the border, which U.S. forces were abruptly ordered to leave earlier this month, allowing Turkey to launch its invasion against Kurdish fighters.

Syria's state-run SANA news agency said Turkish troops and its allied fighters attacked Syrian army positions outside

the town of Tal Tamr. The Syrian troops fought back and suffered "martyrs and wounded," it reported without elaborating. Separately, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said three of its fighters were killed in fighting with Turkish-backed forces.

Syrian forces, Russian military advisers and military police are being deployed in a zone 19 miles deep along much of the northeastern border, under an agreement reached Tuesday by Russia and Turkey. They are to ensure that Kurdish fighters leave that area. Then Russia and Turkey are to begin joint patrols along a narrower strip directly on the Turkish-Syrian border.

Turkey is to keep sole control of a large section in the center of the border, most of which it captured in its invasion launched Oct. 9 against Kurdish-led fighters. Turkey wanted to drive U.S.-allied Kurdish forces out of a "safe zone" along the border after U.S. President Donald Trump pulled American troops from the area.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan renewed a threat to resume its military offensive if his country continued to be "harassed" by the Kurdish militia. He also said Turkey would "crush" any Syrian Kurdish fighter its military

comes across while trying to secure areas under its control.

In Brussels, U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper lashed out at Turkey, saying its invasion of Syria jeopardizes gains made there as the U.S.-led coalition and allied Syrian Kurdish forces battled the Islamic State group.

"Turkey put us all in a very terrible situation. I think the incursion was unwarranted," he said.

The reported attack on Syrian government forces took place at the village of Kozliya on the edges of that Turkish-held zone.

Turkish-backed fighters also captured the nearby village of Manajeer in clashes with Kurdish forces, SANA reported. They battled Kurdish fighters in two other nearby villages, "using heavy weapons," said Mustafa Bali, spokesman for the Kurdish-led SDF. He said the SDF would defend itself.

SDF commander Mazloun Abdi tweeted that Turkish troops and "their jihadists continue to VIOLATE and launch attacks."

Turkey has said it is abiding by the halt in fighting but will eliminate any Kurdish fighters still in the zone where the Russian deal gives it direct control.

Pot found at US nuclear facility in ND

Stars and Stripes

An undisclosed amount of marijuana was discovered earlier this month at a nuclear missile alert facility in central North Dakota, according to multiple media reports.

The drug, which was found Oct. 9 at the facility controlled by Minot Air Force Base, was not near missile operators, Sgt. Benjamin Smith told The Associated Press.

Officials are investigating "reports of suspected illegal drugs at an above-ground facility," a spokesman for Minot's 5th Bomb Wing, 2nd Lt. Gabriel Cushing, told Task & Purpose.

"We take this matter seriously and will investigate this fully," he said, according to the military news website. "No further information will be provided until the investigation concludes."

Minot, which oversees a stable of Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, is also home to a fleet of B-52H Stratofortress bombers.

The base has been under scrutiny since a 2007 mishap in which a B-52 was mistakenly armed with six nuclear-tipped cruise missiles in Minot and flown to a base in Louisiana.

Bill would make service members' kids US citizens

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— A bipartisan effort on Capitol Hill is underway to make the children of service members stationed overseas automatically Americans, responding to a new federal policy that forces some parents to apply for their child's U.S. citizenship.

In August, the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services announced a new policy addressing the definition of "residence" in the Immigration

and Nationality Act. It affects children of service members and civilians living abroad who did not acquire citizenship at birth or while they were living in the United States.

Under Section 320 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, a child born outside the United States can automatically become a citizen if they are physically living in the United States with their parent who is a citizen. With the new policy that goes into effect Tuesday, those children will no longer be considered "residing in the United States" as they had been in the

past, and a parent will have to apply for their child's citizenship before the child turns 18 years old.

When the policy was announced, President Donald Trump's administration was criticized for its immigration policies and how the change would negatively affect military families. There was also widespread confusion about what the change actually meant and who was affected, with some initial reporting interpreting the policy to mean that military children were being denied citizenship.

On Wednesday, Sens. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., and Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., announced they have introduced a bill called the Citizenship for Children of Military Members & Civil Servants Act that would modify Section 320 of the Immigration and Nationality Act so children of service members who are stationed overseas can automatically acquire U.S. citizenship.

"Children of Americans serving their nation abroad are just as worthy of automatic citizenship as any other children," Duckworth said.

Midshipman charged with sex assault

The (Annapolis, Md.) Capital

A U.S. Naval Academy midshipman is charged with breaking into the sleeping quarters of three female midshipmen and sexually assaulting or attempting to sexually assault them on four occasions, according to charging documents.

Third Class Midshipman Nixon Keago has been charged with sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, burglary and obstruction of justice for incidents at the Annapolis, Md., military school in February, September and October 2018 and in New York in May, according to charging documents provided by the Naval Academy. The Naval Criminal Investigative Service is investigating.

While on active duty in February 2018, Keago broke into the dorm room of another midshipman and had sex with her while she slept, charging documents state.

That happened again while he was on active duty on Oct. 21, 2018, the documents state.

The documents outline that he has been charged under Article 120 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, which defines different degrees of sexual assault and rape.

In September 2018 and again in New York this past May, charging documents state, Keago broke into the sleeping quarters of female midshipmen and attempted to have sex with them while they slept, as the Navy Times first reported.

Naval Academy Superintendent Vice Adm. Sean Buck approved the charges last month.

Keago was charged with obstruction of justice for telling midshipmen to lie to military authorities after the incidents in September and May, according to the documents. His attorney could not be reached for comment.

Keago is on an unpaid leave of absence, Naval Academy spokeswoman Jenny Erickson said.

Keago's court-martial trial is scheduled for January at the Washington Navy Yard, Erickson said.

GIs safe after hitting bomb in Afghanistan, military says

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — No American or coalition troops were injured when a U.S. military vehicle struck a roadside bomb in central Afghanistan on Wednesday night, the U.S. military said Thursday.

The incident happened in Parwan province, home to Bagram Airfield, the U.S.' largest base in the country.

The Taliban claimed the attack, saying they destroyed two vehicles and killed eight U.S. troops, but the group often exaggerates its battlefield actions.

"A U.S. vehicle struck an [improvised explosive device] in Parwan province last night; however, no U.S. or Coalition were killed or injured," Col. Sonny Leggett, a spokesman for U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said on Twitter.

The vehicle had come from Bagram Airfield, according to Abdul Salim Noori, a spokesman for Parwan police.

"Coalition forces routinely do patrols to secure the base," Noori said, adding that no civilians were killed or injured by the blast.

Meanwhile, The New York Times on Wednesday, citing unnamed defense officials, reported

that at least five Marines were wounded the day before by a Taliban rocket attack in southern Helmand province.

The attack happened in the provincial capital Lashkar Gar, where the Marines have a small base at the local airfield, the Times said.

The U.S. military did not immediately reply to questions by Stars and Stripes about the incident and declined to discuss the injuries with the Times.

Leggett on Tuesday tweeted "no U.S. or coalition casualties" resulted from the Taliban's "indiscriminate and inaccurate rockets" in Helmand.

The provincial governor's office said the rockets killed three civilians.

Violence in Afghanistan has continued at high levels in recent months despite talks between U.S. and Taliban officials aimed at ending the war, which began 18 years ago this month.

President Donald Trump abruptly ended the talks in September after a Taliban attack in Kabul killed an American soldier.

This year, 17 American troops have been killed in combat in Afghanistan, a number that already surpasses the highest annual tally since NATO replaced its combat mission with a training and advising mission five years ago.

Marine with USS Boxer accused of assault

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

AND AYA ICHIHASHI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A Marine stationed aboard the visiting USS Boxer was arrested this week and accused of assaulting an Okinawa bar manager.

Sgt. Jeison Mendez, 27, is suspected of punching the bar manager in the face and chest and body-slammng him to the ground in a hallway outside the bar after being escorted from the premises about 3 a.m. Wednesday, Naha Police Station deputy chief Shigenari Kinjo told Stars and Stripes on Thursday. Mendez is stationed aboard the Boxer with the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Mendez and another Marine were asked to leave the unnamed seventh-floor establishment in the Asato neighborhood after being "loud" and "really obnoxious," Kinjo said.

The victim, a man in his 20s from Naha, was not injured, he said.

Following the altercation, Mendez fled with his companion down an emergency staircase, Kinjo said.

Police, who were called by witnesses, arrived

quickly and intercepted the men in the staircase before they reached the ground floor.

"The bar manager ... left the bar with them and waited for the elevator then somehow an argument happened, and it got heated," Kinjo said.

Mendez denies punching the bar manager, Kinjo said.

Mendez was being held at Naha Police Station as of Thursday. An assault charge was to be referred to the Naha District Public Prosecutors Office that day.

"We're aware of [the incident] and cooperating with everyone on that," said 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Joe Keiley.

The Boxer — a Wasp-class amphibious assault ship home-ported in San Diego — had arrived Tuesday in Okinawa for a liberty port call when the incident happened, Keiley said. The ship is still in Okinawa.

Over the summer, the Boxer deployed to the 5th Fleet's area of operations amid heightened tensions with Iran. It arrived in the 7th Fleet's area of operations in September and participated in several exercises with allied nations, Task Force 76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Russ Wolfkiel said Thursday.

Republican protest disrupts testimony

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The planned impeachment testimony from a Pentagon official responsible for Ukraine policy resumed Wednesday afternoon after several of President Donald Trump's congressional allies staged a demonstration against the probe and barged into a secure facility on Capitol Hill, causing a more than five-hour delay.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Laura Cooper was due to speak at 10 a.m. in closed testimony focused on the mechanics of U.S. security assistance for Ukraine and fallout from the White House's decision to withhold it for several months. But conservative lawmakers disrupted her session as it was about to begin, refusing to leave the secure room where impeachment witnesses have met with lawmakers.

The demonstration marked the latest attempt by Republicans to discredit the probe into whether Trump ordered the hold on military aid to pressure Ukraine's new president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, into launching investigations that would benefit Trump politically. It follows explosive testimony Tuesday from a key U.S. diplomat, who detailed for impeachment investigators how he was told that Trump had made release of the aid package

contingent on a public pledge by Zelenskyy to investigate the Biden family and the 2016 U.S. election, undercutting Trump's repeated denials of a quid pro quo.

Trump's allies on Capitol Hill have sought to ease pressure on the White House by launching a coordinated messaging campaign against the Democratic-led inquiry, painting it as a secretive attempt to force the president from office. Republicans have decried the closed-door format for witness depositions, aimed at preventing speakers from coordinating their testimony, and the decision to limit participation to members of three House committees, a choice consistent with congressional leaders' past approach to sensitive investigations.

Republicans on the three panels — the Intelligence, Oversight and Foreign Affairs committees — have been permitted to attend the depositions and ask questions. Some of those who barged in ahead of Cooper's testimony are not members of those committees.

Democrats have said they will open the process for public hearings in a matter of weeks after the initial stage of their investigation concludes. On Wednesday, the three Democratic chairmen leading the impeachment inquiry sent a letter

to the State Department with a fresh demand for documents already subpoenaed that have not been turned over.

It was not immediately clear how the standoff at the Capitol was resolved. Democrats debated asking the Capitol Police to physically remove the GOP members but decided against it, fearing that such a dramatic move would play into Republicans' hands, several lawmakers said.

At least 20 Republicans continued to occupy the room — called a SCIF, short for Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility — around 1:45 p.m., GOP aides said. A large number exited just after 2 p.m. to attend votes.

As their protest entered its fifth hour on Wednesday, supporters gave no indication that the effort was close to over. The members "plan to stay there until we have a more open and transparent and fair process," said Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., a prominent conservative lawmaker and close ally of the president.

The demonstration was led by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., one day after members of the conservative House Freedom Caucus met with Trump at the White House. The president urged the group — his steadfast allies — to be "tough" because Democrats are "fighting dirty

and have been fighting dirty" and that "maybe it's time to take the gloves off," according to Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn., who attended.

A senior GOP aide said Wednesday that the protest had the blessing of House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and was originally scheduled for last week, before the death of Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, D-Md., caused the group to change its plans. Cummings was chairman of the House Oversight Committee.

The standoff brought unexpected drama to a day which lawmakers expected to be fairly quiet.

Before Cooper's testimony was to begin, about two dozen conservative Republican members led by Gaetz gathered near the deposition room to protest what they described as Democrats' secretive approach to the inquiry. Several accused Democratic leaders of trying to undo the 2016 election result, rallying behind a talking point promoted by House GOP leaders.

"If behind those doors, they intend to overturn the result of an American presidential election, we want to know what's going on," Gaetz said, accusing Democrats of being "obsessed with attacking a president who we believe has not done anything to deserve impeachment."

Investigation opened in claim of affair with a staffer

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Ethics Committee on Wednesday opened an investigation into Rep. Katie Hill after a conservative website published unsubstantiated accusations that she had an improper relationship with a staffer.

The bipartisan leadership of the Ethics panel announced the probe of the freshman California Democrat, noting "public allegations" that Hill "may have engaged in a sexual rela-

tionship with an individual on her congressional staff."

The panel noted that it is casting no judgment on the validity of the charges, which were based in the report on anonymous sources.

Lawmakers have come under intense criticism for being slow to update Capitol Hill's rules on sexual harassment but finally passed an ethics change last year that, among other steps, banned lawmakers from having sexual relationships with staff aides.

In a statement Tuesday, Hill denied having had an affair with her legislative director.

She asked U.S. Capitol Police for an investigation into intimate photos she said were posted online without her consent.

On Wednesday, Hill confirmed that she had an affair with a campaign staffer — a separate relationship and not the focus of the Ethics panel.

"During the final tumultuous years of my abusive marriage, I became involved in a relationship with someone on

my campaign.

"I know that even a consensual relationship with a subordinate is inappropriate, but I still allowed it to happen despite my better judgment," Hill wrote in a statement.

Hill, who identifies as bisexual and is going through a divorce, said her husband "seems determined to try to humiliate me. I am disgusted that my opponents would seek to exploit such a private matter for political gain."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Wasp attacks snake as it tries to eat

FL GAINESVILLE — Sometimes the circle of life stings. A coral snake found that out the hard way, and a Florida woman caught it all on camera.

Evangeline Cummings posted a video on Twitter of what appears to be a wasp stinging a coral snake that was dangling from a branch attempting to eat another dead snake.

News outlets reported Cummings was in her backyard when she noticed the coral snake attempting to eat its meal.

In the video, a wasp appears and starts circling the snake. When the wasp lands on the snake, it starts thrashing and swinging, attempting to get rid of the wasp.

Fossils stolen from museum display case

KS LAWRENCE — Police in Lawrence were investigating after three fossils were stolen from a display case at the University of Kansas Natural History Museum.

The Lawrence Journal-World reported that the fossils were reported missing Monday but were believed to have been stolen Friday or Saturday.

The university police crime log said someone pried hooks from a display case to open it and take the fossils.

South Vietnamese soldier's urn found

MA LAWRENCE — A man who spent years cleaning trash from Massachusetts rivers recently found one of the most unusual objects he's ever pulled from the depths.

Rocky Morrison, of the Clean River Project, told The Eagle-

Tribune he found a rectangular marble urn in the Merrimack River in Lawrence. The urn was inscribed with the name Truong Ngoc Nguyen.

According to his obituary, Nguyen died in 2016 at age 88. He rose to the rank of major in the Republic of South Vietnam's armed forces. He fled from political persecution and came to Lawrence in 1989.

Morrison posted pictures of the urn on social media to try to find Nguyen's family.

Bomb squad responds after grenades found

ID TWIN FALLS — Members of a southern Idaho family were looking through an elderly relative's belongings when they got a couple of surprises: two World War II-era grenades.

The Times-News reported one grenade was found tucked inside a shadow box, and another was stored among other items of memorabilia belonging to the 94-year-old former soldier.

The grenade in the shadow box was inert, but the other was believed to be a live military ordnance.

The Mountain Home Air Force Base Explosive Ordnance Disposal team was contacted, and the grenade was detonated at the local landfill.

Man caught trying to steal home plate

IA DES MOINES — Des Moines police caught a man who said he wanted to steal home plate at the city's minor league baseball park.

Polk County court records said Daniel Igel was arrested at Principal Park, home of the Iowa Cubs, a Chicago Cubs affiliate. He was charged with felony burglary.

A court document said Igel was found after he climbed a fence to get into the park. He told officers he was trying to steal the plate and had scaled the fence the night before and tried to break into the press box.

Prosecutors: Victims lost \$1M in scheme

NC CHARLOTTE — Federal prosecutors said a man from Ghana living in North Carolina pleaded guilty to a scam targeting elderly people with promises of romance and wealth.

The Charlotte-based U.S. Attorney's Office said in a news release that Suleman Alhassan pleaded guilty to wire and mail fraud conspiracy.

The news release said he and others used online dating websites to target fraud victims and develop fake romantic relationships. They told victims they owned large amounts of gold and needed money to ship the gold from Africa to the U.S.

Prosecutors say the victims were promised a share of the profits from gold sales, but people lost more than \$1 million through the scheme.

Police say man set girlfriend's wig aflame

MD BALTIMORE — Police said a Baltimore man set his girlfriend's wig on fire and threatened to burn down her home.

The Capital reported Darius K. Gissentaner, 28, was arrested and charged with arson. Anne Arundel County police said officers received a call from a woman who said her boyfriend had locked her out of her apartment and was burning her wig on her gas stove.

Police said officers arrived to find Gissentaner smoking a

cigarette nearby. They said he then ran inside and refused to open the apartment's door.

Officers forced their way inside and found more than \$2,400 in damage to the apartment.

Stolen giant rabbit returned later in day

NE LINCOLN — Police said a rabbit valued at \$450 stolen from its pen in a Lincoln yard was returned.

A woman reported that she discovered that her orange Continental giant rabbit had been stolen from her backyard. A surveillance camera trained on the rabbit's cage was blocked by a vehicle. Police said all that could be seen on the footage was the cage door swinging open.

Police said the rabbit, named Argus, was returned to the woman's front yard later Monday.

Police report multiple stolen military medals

WY CHEYENNE — Wyoming authorities reported military medals dating back to World War II were stolen from a trailer outside a veteran organization.

The Wyoming Tribune Eagle reported that Cheyenne police were alerted of the theft after a passerby found an emptied shadow box near Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1881.

Cheyenne police said the passerby called Martha Albright, whose father's medals were inside the shadow box.

Authorities said Albright donated Purple Heart and Bronze Star medals and other items about two years ago for Armed Forces Day.

Authorities said only the medals were missing.

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Strasburg shines, Nationals take 2-0 lead

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Stephen Strasburg's time had come.

Famously held out of the postseason seven years ago, Strasburg delivered on the biggest stage of all Wednesday night.

The right-hander outpitched fellow ace Justin Verlander, overcoming a shaky start to help the Washington Nationals beat the Houston Astros 12-3 for a 2-0 lead in the World Series.

Strasburg went six innings to earn the win — and a group hug in the dugout when he was done.

"They keep squeezing me a little harder every time," he said. "That's OK."

Kurt Suzuki hit a tiebreaking homer in what became a messy six-run seventh, and the Nationals headed back home needing two victories in three potential games in Washington to claim their first championship.

Adam Eaton paraded around the bases pointing to the Houston crowd after a late home

run as the Nationals won their eighth in a row. They've won 18 of 20 overall dating back to the regular season, with the last two over AL Cy Young Award favorites Gerrit Cole and Verlander.

Game 3 is Friday night, when Anibal Sanchez opposes Houston's Zack Greinke in the first World Series game in the nation's capital since 1933.

"Probably going to be a little frigid, might be a little cold, so bring your jackets and your beanies," said slugger Anthony Rendon, who hit a two-run double in the first inning.

Strasburg, 31, waited years for this chance. In 2012, he was about two years removed from Tommy John surgery when the Nationals decided protecting his elbow was more important than pitching him in the playoffs, so he was shut down late in a season full of promise.

Making his Series debut, Strasburg allowed a two-run homer to Alex Bregman in the first before throwing five shutout innings to improve

to 4-0 this postseason. He allowed seven hits and struck out seven.

Nationals manager Dave Martinez was asked what's made Strasburg so good this October.

"One, he has the confidence to do it and two, he's become a premier pitcher, a big-game pitcher," Martinez said. "He doesn't get rattled."

Verlander, so good in the regular season, fell to 0-5 in six World Series starts. He gave up seven hits and four runs, and was lifted after walking a batter following Suzuki's home run.

Verlander led the majors with 21 wins this season and struck out a career-high 300 to reach 3,000 in his career. He has a World Series ring, AL MVP and Cy Young Award trophies, and three no-hitters to his name.

He struck out six to become the career leader in postseason strikeouts with 202 — another impressive statistic on a stellar résumé that's still missing that elusive World Series win.

"Obviously it's magnified in the World Series when you're not clicking on all cylinders," Verlander said.

Their victories against Houston's best pitchers turned the underdog Nationals into heavy favorites to take the title.

Only three of the previous 25 teams to lose the first two games at home under the 2-3-2 format have come back to win the Series. No one has done it since the 1996 New York Yankees came back against the Atlanta Braves.

"I wish I was a betting man, but I'm not," Martinez said. "I don't really believe in that stuff. ... We're here because the boys never gave up."

The Astros insist the tough start hasn't dampened their confidence.

"We have a really good team," manager AJ Hinch said. "Clearly, the Nats have outplayed us — bottom line. They came into our building and played two really good games. We're going to have to try to sleep off the latter third of this game."

Astros' Verlander 1st to go 0-5 in World Series

Associated Press

HOUSTON — All of Justin Verlander's illustrious accomplishments mean little right now.

Not those 225 wins, not the 3,006 regular season strikeouts, not the record 202 postseason Ks. Not the eight All-Star selections, not the 2011 Cy Young Award and Most Valuable Player prize.

Verlander dropped to 0-5 in World Series games Wednesday night as the Washington Nationals routed the Houston Astros 12-3 for a 2-0 Series lead. That skid on baseball's biggest stage is dragging the right-hander's reputation down like ballast sinking a ship to the bottom of the sea.

Never before has a pitcher lost his first five World Series decisions.

"We don't dwell on win-loss record anymore, right?" he said with a smile, a reference to modern analytics by one of the sport's most knowledgeable players. "I'd like to win a couple. Hopefully, I'll have another opportunity."

He wound up flat on his back in the fourth inning, slipping on Ryan Zimmerman's grounder and firing the ball off his

own left leg. Verlander could smile about that one, an instant blooper reel staple.

But he was razed along with all the Astros in the seventh, and that was no laughing matter.

On his 100th pitch, Verlander gave up a go-ahead home run to Kurt Suzuki, who had not driven in a run in this postseason, the start of a spirit-crushing six-run inning that lifted Washington.

Suzuki is a .340 (16-for-45) hitter against Verlander, and the big home run off a 94 mph fastball at the letters came on Verlander's second pitch to catcher Martin Maldonado, who had not been behind the plate for Verlander since the 2018 AL Championship Series.

Prior to Suzuki's at-bat, every pitch by Verlander this season had been delivered to catcher Robinson Chirinos, who left when manager AJ Hinch replaced him with pinch-hitter Kyle Tucker, who struck out with two on for the final out of the sixth.

"Maldy and I had worked together a lot last year," Verlander said. "First-pitch curveball for a ball, and then fastball that was right there for him."

A likely Hall of Famer with a supermodel wife, the 36-year-old Verlander has a 5.73 ERA in six World Series starts.

Trea Turner started with just the third four-pitch walk leading off a game in Verlander's big league career and the first in 11 years.

He has allowed nine first-inning runs, most for any pitcher in one postseason, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Verlander could laugh about hitting his own leg, at least.

"Seventy-five percent of that play was pretty athletic," he said with a laugh, mixing in a profanity. "It was a one-in-a-million play, anyway."

In early 2018, he took a poke at Dodgers pitcher Yu Darvish, who had slipped rounding second base on a double, tweeting: "Not doing a lot here to help us dispel the pitchers aren't athletes thing."

Darvish tweeted back those same words Wednesday.

"He's probably been waiting in the weeds forever," Verlander said, "waiting for his opportunity for me to do something stupid."

Tiger survives shaky start, leads in Japan

By JIM ARMSTRONG

Associated Press

INZAI CITY, Japan — Tiger Woods couldn't have scripted a better scenario for the PGA's first tournament in Japan despite his shaky start.

After a layoff from arthroscopic surgery on his left knee two months ago, Woods shot a 6-under 64 on Thursday to share the first-round lead at the Zozo Championship.

Woods was tied with Gary Woodland, with local favorite Hideki Matsuyama one stroke behind.

Teeing off from the 10th hole, things didn't start well for Woods who sent his opening shot into the water. That led to the first of three straight bogeys.

"The start I got off to wasn't very good, I hit bad shot after bad shot ... and the next thing you know, things aren't looking so good," Woods said.

But the Masters champion quickly found his game at the Accordia Golf Narashino Country Club, with birdies on four of his next six holes to get to 1 under.

"After the start, the ball striking was

better, the putting was really good," Woods said. "I was hitting a lot of good putts, the ball was rolling tight which was nice."

Woods is making his first start in his 23rd season on the PGA Tour, needing one victory to reach 82 wins and tie the career record held by Sam Snead.

Woods last played in an official tournament in Japan in 2006 at the Dunlop Phoenix, where he lost in a playoff to Pádraig Harrington. He won the Dunlop Phoenix the two previous years.

As pleased as Woods was with his day, the Japanese fans couldn't have been happier. The American is hugely popular in Japan and drew the biggest galleries on Thursday.

"The people here in Japan have come out and supported this event," Woods said. "It's been a lot of fun to play in front of them again, I haven't done it in a while. I've missed it."

"They've always been fantastic with golf and supported their golf here."

Woodland had six birdies, including one on the par-5 18th.

"I played well from top to bottom," Wood-

land said. "I drove the ball well and anytime I can control the ball on the greens from the fairway, that adds up to a pretty good day."

Matsuyama led early with four birdies on the front nine, but faltered with a bogey on the final hole.

"I am just one stroke behind the leader so think I am in a good position," Matsuyama said. "Tomorrow I need to minimize my mistakes."

The Zozo tournament is part of three tournaments that make up the PGA Tour's Asia Swing, including the CJ Cup in South Korea won last week by Justin Thomas and the HSBC Champions in Shanghai next week.

Organizers said more than 20,000 attended the opening day.

Among the other big names, Rory McIlroy (72) struggled with the windy conditions and Thomas had an even-par 70.

Jason Day, who beat Woods in a Skins game on Monday at the same venue, finished with a 73 while Jordan Spieth shot a 74.

Phillies, Cubs, Padres find new managers

Associated Press

The number of open managerial jobs around the major leagues got a little smaller on Thursday, as the Philadelphia Phillies, Chicago Cubs and San Diego Padres all agreed to deals filling their vacant positions.

According to a person familiar with the deal, the Phillies have agreed to hire former Yankees manager Joe Girardi to replace Gabe Kapler.

Kapler was fired after an injury-depleted team went 81-81 despite significant offseason additions highlighted by Bryce Harper's arrival. He was 161-163 in his two seasons. The Phillies also interviewed Dusty Baker and Buck Showalter.

Girardi was one of the most prominent candidates to fill vacant managerial spots across baseball. He led New York to its 27th World Series title, beating the Phillies in six games in 2009.

He succeeded Joe Torre after the 2007 season and spent a decade in pinstripes. He also

managed the Marlins one season and was NL Manager of the Year after going 78-84 in 2006. His record with the Yankees was 910-710, the sixth most wins in team history.

The 55-year-old Girardi hit .267 as a catcher for 15 seasons in the majors. He won three championships with the Yankees in the 1990s and was an All-Star for the Cubs in 2000.

The Cubs hired another former catcher, tabbing David Ross to replace Joe Maddon as their manager, hoping he can help them get back to the playoffs after missing out for the first since 2014.

The Cubs announced a three-year deal with Ross with a club option for the 2023 season. He becomes the 55th manager in club history.

The 42-year-old Ross played the final two of his 15 major league seasons with the Cubs and was a revered leader on the 2016 team that won the World Series, ending a championship drought dating to 1908. He spent the past three years in

Chicago's front office and was widely viewed as a potential replacement for Maddon, who compiled a 471-339-1 record in five seasons.

"I'm honored by this opportunity to be the next manager of the Chicago Cubs," Ross said in a statement. "My time with this organization has been special since the day I joined, so to continue with the club in this role is a blessing for which I'm so very thankful."

Chairman Tom Ricketts described Ross as a "proven winner." And president of baseball operations Theo Epstein called him "as gifted a leader as I've ever come across."

Ross has no coaching or managing experience. But he played a huge role in reshaping the culture of the Cubs' clubhouse and was affectionately nicknamed "Grandpa Rossy" by Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo.

At age 39, he became the oldest player to homer in a Game 7 of the World Series when he

connected off Andrew Miller in the sixth inning in Cleveland. The Cubs went on to win in the 10th, and Ross got carried off the field and into retirement by Rizzo and Jason Heyward.

San Diego is also turning to a rookie manager — for the second consecutive time — as it tries to bridge the difficult gap between rebuilding and contending.

The Padres have hired Jayce Tingler from the Texas Rangers to take over a team that has missed the playoffs for 13 straight seasons and hasn't had a winning record in nine years, a person familiar with the situation said Thursday.

Tingler has most recently been on the Rangers' coaching staff as major league player development field coordinator, working with outfielders and baserunners. His only previous managerial experience has been at the lowest rungs, including guiding Leones del Escogido to a 9-1 start in the Dominican Winter League.

NBA roundup

Nets fall to T-wolves despite Irving's 50

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kyrie Irving scored 50 points in a record-setting Nets debut, but lost his balance and missed a potential winning shot that allowed the Minnesota Timberwolves to pull out a 127-126 victory over Brooklyn in overtime Wednesday night.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 36 points and 14 rebounds for Minnesota, and Andrew Wiggins added 21 points, including the go-ahead basket with 1:19 remaining.

Irving had the ball in his hands with a chance to cap his dazzling debut with a victory following a Nets timeout. He ran the clock down and then began his drive, but lost his balance near the foul line. He retained his dribble, got up and shot, but his jumper missed.

After signing with the Nets in July, Irving broke Kiki Vandeweghe's record for most points by a player in his first game with a team. Vandeweghe scored 47 points for Portland at Kansas City on Oct. 27, 1984.

Nuggets 108, Trail Blazers 100: Nikola Jokic had 20 points and 13 rebounds despite sitting much of the first half because of foul trouble, and visiting Denver spoiled the opening game of Portland's 50th season.

Will Barton added 19 points for the Nuggets, who also snapped Portland's 18-game winning streak in home openers, the longest streak in league history.

76ers 107, Celtics 93: Joel Embiid had 15 points and 13 rebounds, Ben Sim-

mons scored 24 points and host Philadelphia beat Boston.

Gordon Hayward led the Celtics with 25 points. Jayson Tatum had 21. Kemba Walker scored 12 points on 4-of-18 shooting in his Boston debut, and Al Horford had 16 in his first game with the 76ers.

Hornets 126, Bulls 125: Rookie PJ Washington hit seven three-pointers and scored 27 points to help Charlotte open the post-Kemba Walker era with a victory over visiting Chicago.

The Hornets made 23 three-pointers, the most in franchise history in a regulation game. The record is 24 in a double-overtime game. Devonte Graham had 23 points on 6-of-7 3-point shooting and added eight assists.

Lauri Markkanen led Chicago with 35 points and 17 rebounds.

Magic 94, Cavaliers 85: Nikola Vucevic had 21 points and nine rebounds in host Orlando's victory over Cleveland.

Mavericks 108, Wizards 100: Luka Doncic had 34 points and nine rebounds and Kristaps Porzingis scored 23 points in the European pair's long-awaited first game together, leading Dallas past visiting Washington.

Porzingis missed his first four shots before taking a break and coming back to score nine points in the final 2:45 of the first quarter. The 7-foot-3 Latvian acquired in a blockbuster deal with the New York Knicks before the trading deadline last season was 7 of 16 from the field.

Heat 120, Grizzlies 101: Justise Winslow scored 27 points, rookie Kendrick Nunn scored 24 in his NBA debut and host Miami ran away in the fourth quarter to beat Memphis.

Goran Dragic scored 19 points for Miami, which played without Jimmy Butler because of personal reasons. Nunn and fellow rookie Tyler Herro started in the backcourt instead.

Pistons 119, Pacers 110: Andre Drummond had 32 points and 23 rebounds, and Luke Kennard made three three-pointers in the final six minutes in Detroit's opening victory over visiting Indiana.

Kennard scored 30 points, a career best, and matched his career high with six 3s.

Spurs 120, Knicks 111: LaMarcus Aldridge had 22 points, Bryn Forbes added 20 and host San Antonio, spoiling No. 2 overall pick RJ Barrett's debut with New York.

Barrett had 21 points on 9-for-13 shooting with five rebounds and two assists in 37 minutes. Marcus Morris led New York with 26 points, and Julius Randle had 25 points and 11 rebounds.

aSuns 124, Kings 95: Devin Booker had 22 points and 10 assists, Kelly Oubre Jr. added 21 points and Phoenix beat visiting Sacramento in Monte Williams' first game as Suns coach.

Jazz 100, Thunder 95: Donovan Mitchell had 32 points and 12 rebounds to lead host Utah past Oklahoma City.

NHL roundup

Hedman, Lightning slip past Penguins

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Victor Hedman scored a power-play goal with 56.8 seconds remaining to give the Tampa Bay Lightning a 3-2 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Wednesday night.

The defenseman scored from just inside the blue line off Steven Stamkos' pass from the left circle.

Alex Killorn and Cedric Paquette also scored, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 37 saves,

including a pair of in-close chances in the final seconds of regulation. One of them, taken by Kris Letang, required a lengthy video review before it was confirmed that the puck go in.

Brandon Tanev and Jake Guentzel scored and Tristan Jarry stopped 45 shots for the Penguins. Sidney Crosby picked up an assist and moved past Norm Ullman into sole possession of 40th place on the NHL career points list with 1,230.

The injury-depleted Penguins are without forwards Evgeni Malkin, Alex Galchenyuk, Nick Bjugstad and Bryan Rust, and defensemen Brian Dumoulin and Zach Trotman.

Senators 5, Red Wings 2: Anthony Duclair scored twice and host Ottawa snapped a four-game skid and extended Detroit's losing streak to six.

Chris Tierney, Mark Borowiecki and Jean-Gabriel Pageau also scored to help the Senators improve to 2-6-1.

Anders Nilsson made 34

saves for his first victory of the season.

Darren Helm and Tyler Bertuzzi scored for Detroit, and Jonathan Bernier stopped 33 shots. The Red Wings are 3-7-0.

After Detroit scored twice in a 1:40 span early in the second period to take a 2-1 lead, Borowiecki tied it at 3:15 and Pageau made it a two-goal game with a short-handed goal at 5:27. Duclair scored late in the second and added an empty-netter in the third.