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House grills DOD on Germany troop removal

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — The plan for a large-scale U.S. force reduction in Germany remains a work in progress, Pentagon officials said Wednesday as House lawmakers questioned whether the plan to pull 12,000 troops from the country makes fiscal or strategic sense.

“I don’t think this plan was particularly well-thought-out,” Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., said during a House Armed Services Committee hearing on the proposal.

Smith, the chairman of the committee, also blasted Pentagon officials for failing to describe in any detail how and when the push to cut troops in Germany would be

implemented.

“We are not getting the level of insight on this decision that we should,” he said. “The level of detail we are getting here is just not acceptable. ... We need to hear better what the hell is going on.”

James Anderson, acting undersecretary of defense for policy, and Air Force Lt. Gen. David W. Allvin, the director for strategy, plans, and policy for the Joint Staff, testified Wednesday on the Pentagon effort to move roughly 5,600 troops in Germany to different locations in Europe and about 6,400 others back to the United States. The plan was met with skepticism by several lawmakers who raised concerns about the strategy. Their questions included the high costs of moving

large units and the possibility of sparking more aggression in Eastern Europe from Russia.

“It looks like we are pulling back,” said Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Ala.

Anderson defended the strategy as one that will give the military more “flexibility” and make it more unpredictable to adversaries when it rotates forces back and forth to Europe. He said the hope is a clearer plan for how to implement the draw-down would emerge by 2021, but executing the initiative will be a multiyear endeavor.

“It will take some time,” Anderson said. “It’s months of planning and years of execution.”

Cost estimates are still being formulated, but the moves are expected to be in the single-digit billions, he said.

The plan to downsize U.S. forces in Germany, which came in response to a White House directive, was announced in July and effects a wide range of units. The biggest changes call for sending 4,500 soldiers with the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, based in Vilseck, Germany, back to the U.S. and relocating the Stuttgart-based U.S. European Command to Belgium. U.S. Africa Command, also in Stuttgart, will move to a location that has yet to be determined.

Smith said lawmakers, during an earlier briefing with Pentagon officials, were told the idea of moving AFRICOM wasn’t about strategy but to help the military reach the troop-reduction numbers mandated from the White House.

SC governor vows to work to keep Parris Island open

Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — South Carolina’s governor promised Thursday to do whatever the Marines need to keep open the training base at Parris Island after a top military official floated the idea of closing the base and building a new one elsewhere that would allow it to easily begin training men and women together.

Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger stunned the military-boosting state last week when he mentioned the possibility during an interview published on the Military.com website.

Berger also mentioned closing another base in San Diego, saying it might be easier to start from scratch than trying to make adjustments at each of the bases. The Marines face a five-year deadline for gender-

integrated training at Parris Island and an eight-year deadline in San Diego.

“Nothing, the way we’re organized right now, lends itself to integrated recruit training,” the website quoted Berger as saying. “If that’s our start point — and it is — we have to get to a place on both coasts, or at a third location.”

A spokesman for Berger expanded on his comments to the website, saying while nothing had been decided, the Marines had to consider what would be the best way to spend its money.

“If you have to update a lot anyway, do you save manpower, resources and personnel by just combining the two into one?” Marine Maj. Eric Flanagan remarked.

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster brought commanders from every military instal-

lation in the state to the capital of Columbia on Thursday — and he had a leader from Parris Island talk first.

McMaster said the base “adds greatly to the character and strength, economic and otherwise, of this state.”

“Anything we can do to support your mission, we’ll do it,” the governor said.

Parris Island has been training Marines for 120 years on the island, located off the state’s southern coast. The base has problems aside from the challenge of making the necessary accommodations to train women alongside men, including rising sea levels and old buildings that need improvements. Marine Col. Ricardo Player told the governor that the military is spending \$30 million to upgrade rifle ranges at the base.

Player stressed during the

meeting that the Marines are looking at all options as it embarks on gender-integrated training, but he also acknowledged the state’s support, saying the Marines have always felt that South Carolina was willing to help them in any way possible.

“I think we’re all firing on the same target,” he said.

South Carolina leaders also indicated their willingness to go head-to-head with San Diego to be the base that survives. They noted that Marine recruits at Parris Island get all their training in one place, while San Diego requires two different facilities because of a lack of space.

“It’s clear to me Parris Island has all the advantages and none of the disadvantages,” McMaster said. “We’re looking forward to the presence and expansion on Parris Island.”

Airmen can now grow their hair longer under appearance revision

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force is allowing both male and female airmen to wear their hair a bit longer.

The service approved a revision to its dress and personal appearance regulations on Sept. 15, the latest in a series of changes made in effort to “enhance inclusiveness” while at the same time maintaining professional standards, the Air Force said in a news release Tuesday.

Effective immediately, men are now approved to have hair 2 inches long from their scalp, a “hair bulk” that is ¾ inch longer than previously allowed.

The maximum length of women’s hair has been increased from 3½ inches to 4 inches.

In an additional change, men can have one front-to-back straight-line part—cut, clipped or shaved—on either side of their head above the temple. The part cannot be slanted or curved or exceed 4 inches in length or ¼ inch in width.

The Air Force also clarified that airmen can dye their hair

any natural color, regardless the color of their own natural hair. It defines those colors as brown, blonde, brunette, natural red, black and gray.

The service had previously announced changes to its policy regarding shaving waivers due to razor bumps, a condition common among Black men. In July, the Air Force revised its appearance regulations to remove the term “faddish” in regard to issues of complexion after concluding it was subjective language.

“As we listened to Airmen and Space Professionals, we reviewed our policies and identified language in our dress and appearance instruction that was problematic for certain groups,” Lisa Truesdale, Air Force deputy director of military force management policy, said in a July statement as the Air Force began the series of revisions.

“Ensuring inclusive language in our policies is one of the first steps in creating a more inclusive culture where all uniformed members can thrive and maximize their fullest potential,” she said.

Report: Russian military improved

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The Russian military is more capable than at any time since the end of the Cold War, the result of an effort to produce a more agile force, a new study found.

“Though significantly smaller than their Soviet predecessors, these forces are better equipped, with professional personnel increasingly prevalent,” the International Institute for Strategic Studies said in its latest assessment of the Russian military.

The report, released Wednesday, described a military that has rebounded from the neglect of the 1990s, when Russia was in disarray after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Moscow also has benefited from lessons learned during its brief war with Georgia in 2008, which exposed command and control and logistical shortcomings, the IISS report said.

While the Russians easily defeated the much smaller Geor-

gian force, Moscow’s “New Look” reform program was launched to make improvements “in the wake of the armed forces’ poor performance,” the report said.

Those reforms laid the foundations for the current Russian military, which is being used to extend Moscow’s influence beyond its borders.

“Russia’s annexation of Crimea, its involvement in the war in eastern Ukraine and its decisive intervention in the Syrian civil war exemplify growing military confidence and capability,” the report said.

Russia’s ground forces have modernized by fielding the Iskander short-range ballistic-missile system and new self-propelled artillery. Combined with new command-and-control networks and drones, Russia’s forces can “find, fix and strike adversary formations at greater range than before,” the report said.

Russia has also upgraded its Navy, including with more modern submarines, the report said.

USAF patch with Reaper drone over China vexes Beijing

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

An Air Force patch depicting an MQ-9 Reaper drone flying over China has angered state media in the communist country.

The patch, which also shows a skeletal Grim Reaper equipped with his scythe, was worn by airmen participating in Agile Reaper, an exercise last month involving three of the drones deployed to Naval Station Point Mugu, Calif., from Holloman Air Force Base, N.M.

A photograph of airmen wearing the patch, which in-

cludes an outline of a map of China, appeared in the Sept. 24 edition of Air Force Magazine, provoking an angry response from Chinese state media.

“This is an extremely arrogant provocation,” the Global Times newspaper said in an article Tuesday. “This is a move to further stir hostilities between Chinese and American societies and an extortion against China. The US military is using the drones and patches to stimulate the imagination and create images of China and the US going to war.”

The newspaper on Sept. 19

posted a video issued by the Chinese air force that showed nuclear-capable H-6 bombers carrying out a simulated attack on what appears to be Andersen Air Force Base on Guam.

The fact that the U.S. military is preparing to deter and fight a near-peer adversary such as China or Russia is no secret.

“Long-term strategic competitions with China and Russia are the principal priorities for the Department [of Defense], and require both increased and sustained investment, because of the magnitude of the threats they pose to U.S. security and

prosperity today, and the potential for those threats to increase in the future,” the 2018 National Defense Strategy states.

Patches depicting potential adversaries have a history in the Air Force. As recently as February, members of the 18th Aggressor Squadron out of Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, wore red and black patches showing a Soviet-era hammer and sickle over a palm tree while participating in the Cope North drills on Guam.

The aggressors’ mission involves playing the role of enemy air forces during training.

Pilot praised for safe landing after crash

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The pilot of a fuel tanker showed impressive skills when he touched down safely in a remote area of California and prevented injuries among the seven other crew members after a midair collision with a fighter jet, a Marine Corps official and safety aviation expert said Wednesday.

It was unclear what happened to cause the F-35B to collide with the KC-130J tanker in the late afternoon Tuesday, said 1st Lt. Brett Vannier, a spokesman at Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Ariz.

The fighter jet was refueling when the collision occurred. The pilot ejected successfully from the F-35B. The tanker pilot landed the big aircraft on its belly in a field near the desert town of Thermal.

“It was an impressive maneuver bringing it down safely by force,” Vannier said.

“His skills kind of speak to itself just in the fact that everyone survived.”

Aviation safety consultant and retired Marine Corps Col. Pete Field, a former director of the Naval Test Pilot School, agreed.

“I think the KC-130 crew did a masterful job of airmanship to get that baby down,” Field said, noting the size of the tanker that can carry up to 60,000 pounds of fuel.

Military officials said the cause of the collision is under investigation and they could not discuss the damage to the aircraft or other details.

Field, who examined photos of the damaged tanker, said he does not know how things went wrong during what is generally a routine operation.

The images show liquid pouring out of the tanker’s port wing and damage to the propeller blades, among other things.

Midair refueling “on any airplane in the fighter world is something that pilots learn to do in their training command. It’s a basic thing,” Field said. “This shouldn’t have been done badly.”

Often the blame lies with the jet pilot who can approach a tanker too quickly or can get too close and not be able to compensate, Field said. But that is highly unusual with today’s radar systems and a sophisticated plane like the F-35B. The crash also occurred during the day when visibility should have been good.

Field wondered how much experience the pilot had on the F-35B, a complicated plane.

The four-engine turboprop tanker landed in Thermal, a small desert city in Riverside County about 125 miles northeast of downtown San Diego.

Marines activate 1st new base since 1952 on Guam

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps has activated a new base on Guam for 5,000 members of III Marine Expeditionary Force set to move there over the next five years from Okinawa, Japan.

Camp Blaz, near Andersen Air Force Base, is the first new Marine installation since Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany was commissioned in Georgia on March 1, 1952, according to a Marine Corps statement announcing the activation this week.

“As the Marine Corps presence on Guam grows, I am confident that we ... will honor the history of the island of Guam, we will have the courage to defend it, and we will remain committed to preserving its cultural and environmental resources,” the camp’s first commander, Col. Bradley Magrath, said in the statement.

The activation comes at a time of rising tensions in the Pacific as China presses claims to sea territory and builds military forces that threaten U.S. forces stationed in the region.

Camp Blaz is named in honor of the late Marine Brig. Gen. Vicente “Ben” Tomas Garrido Blaz, a Guam native.

“Blaz’ legacy reflects the strong relationship that the Marine Corps and the people of Guam have shared since the establishment of the Marine Barracks [on Guam] in 1899,” the Marines said in their statement.

The new base is still under construction in an area known as Finegayan on land that, until recently, was covered in a thick jungle full of snakes and littered with World War II-era bombs and bullets.

Only 1,300 Marines will be permanently stationed on Guam, with another 3,700 coming to the island as a rotational force in the same way a Marine Air Ground Task Force deploys to Australia’s Northern Territory to train each summer, he said.

The heart of Camp Blaz, where six-story barracks will be built for unaccompanied Marines, is next door to Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Guam, just west of Andersen.

Tattoo shop on Nev. base could begin new trend

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Since the American Tattoo Society opened its latest studio in a storefront northeast of Las Vegas last month, a common reaction from passersby has been disbelief, its owner said.

“It’s wild how many people walk by and they kind of look up and it’s like, ‘Holy ... what am I looking at here?’” said Ryan Harrell, who owns the shop at the Nellis Air Force Base Exchange with his wife, Nicole. “Is this really a tattoo shop inside the exchange?”

Yes, it is. And Military Star Cards are accepted at the store, which opened last month. Its grand opening celebration begins Friday morning.

Though some U.S. bases have had visiting tattoo artists, the exchange’s tattoo parlor appears to be the first of its kind. No other Army, Air Force, Navy or Marine exchange has operated or provided space for such a venture before, according to several exchange officials.

Harrell hopes the Nellis location is the first of many on-

base shops for his company and has sights set on Fort Bragg, just down the road from the couple’s flagship studio in his hometown of Fayetteville, N.C., where they have run the All American Tattoo Convention for several years.

Started by his wife when she was still a schoolteacher more than five years ago, the business caters to military personnel and has since opened a second shop just off Camp Lejeune in the eastern part of the state.

He and his wife were “kind of shot down immediately” several years back, he said.

Then he heard Army and Air Force Exchange Service officials had changed heart a few years ago, when several services relaxed their tattoo policies, including the Air Force’s 2017 decision to end size limits on most tattoos to boost recruitment.

The commands that operate exchanges on Marine Corps and Navy bases have also been looking into opening tattoo parlors, officials with both outfits said this week.

Layoffs in US remain at elevated level

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits declined last week to a still-high 837,000, evidence that the economy is struggling to sustain a tentative recovery that began this summer.

The Labor Department's report, released Thursday, suggests that companies are still cutting a historically high number of jobs, though the weekly numbers have become less reliable as states have increased their efforts to root out fraudulent claims and process earlier applications that have piled up.

California, for example, which accounts for more than one-quarter of the nation's

aid applications, this week simply provided the same figure it did the previous week. That's because the state has stopped accepting new jobless claims for two weeks so it can implement anti-fraud technology and address a backlog of 600,000 applications that are more than 3 weeks old.

Overall jobless aid has shrunk in recent weeks even as roughly 25 million people rely upon it. The loss of that income is likely to weaken spending and the economy in the coming months.

A \$600-a-week federal check that Congress provided in last spring's economic aid package was available to the unemployed in addition to each state's jobless benefit. But the \$600 benefit expired at the end of July. A \$300 weekly benefit that President

Donald Trump offered through an executive order lasted only through mid-September, although some states are still working to send out checks for that period.

A result is that Americans' incomes and spending are declining or slowing. Total paid unemployment benefits plunged by more than half in August, according to the Commerce Department. Consumer spending did rise 1% that month, down from 1.5% in July. But that increase relied in part on consumers drawing upon their savings.

"Unless employment growth picks up, or additional (government) aid is extended, consumer spending is at risk of slowing dramatically during the second phase of the recovery," said Gregory Daco, an economist at Oxford Economics.

Trump signs temporary government funding bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has signed a bill to fund the government through Dec. 11, averting the possibility of a government shutdown as the new fiscal year started Thursday.

Trump signed the bill, which was approved by sweeping bipartisan agreement Wednesday, into law early Thursday morning shortly after returning from campaigning in Minnesota.

The temporary extension will set the stage for a lame-duck session of Congress later this year, where the agenda will be

largely determined by the outcome of the presidential election.

The measure would keep the government running through Dec. 11 and passed by a 84-10 vote. The House passed the bill last week.

The stopgap spending bill is required because the GOP-controlled Senate has not acted on any of the 12 annual spending bills that fund the 30% of the government's budget that is passed by Congress each year. If Democratic nominee Joe Biden wins the White House in November, it's likely that another stopgap measure would fund the government into next year and that the

next administration and Congress would deal with the leftover business.

The measure is the bare minimum accomplishment for Capitol Hill's powerful Appropriations committees, who pride themselves on their deal-making abilities despite gridlock in other corners of Congress.

The legislation — called a continuing resolution, or CR, in Washington-speak — would keep every federal agency running at current funding levels through Dec. 11, which will keep the government afloat past an election that could reshuffle Washington's balance of power.

Biden, Trump snipe on the trail from road and rails

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden kept up their debate-stage sniping from the road and the rails, fighting for working-class voters in the Midwest while both parties — and the debate commission, too — sought to deal with the most chaotic presidential faceoff in memory.

The debate raised fresh questions about Trump's continued reluctance to condemn white supremacy, his questioning the legitimacy of the election and his unwillingness to respect debate ground rules his campaign had agreed to. Some Democrats called on Biden on Wednesday to skip the next two debates.

Biden's campaign confirmed he would participate in the subsequent meetings,

as did Trump's. But the Commission on Presidential Debates promised "additional structure ... to ensure a more orderly discussion of the issues."

Less than 12 hours after the wild debate concluded, Biden called Trump's behavior in the prime-time confrontation "a national embarrassment." The Democratic challenger launched his most aggressive day on the campaign trail all year, with eight stops on train tour that began midmorning in Cleveland and ended 10 hours later in western Pennsylvania. Trump proclaimed his debate performance a smashing success during a Wednesday evening rally in Duluth, Minn.

"Last night I did what the corrupt media has refused to do," Trump said. "I held Joe Biden accountable for his 47 years of

failure."

Biden balanced criticism of Trump with a call for national unity.

"If elected, I'm not going to be a Democratic president. I'm going to be an American president," Biden said at the Cleveland train station. As his tour moved into Pittsburgh, he accused Trump of never accepting responsibility for his mistakes and promised, "I'll always tell you the truth. And when I'm wrong, I'll say so."

The first of three scheduled debates between Trump and Biden deteriorated into bitter taunts and chaos Tuesday night as the Republican president repeatedly interrupted his Democratic rival with angry jabs that overshadowed any substantive discussion of the crises threatening the nation.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Officials confirm Asian giant hornet sightings

WA BLAINE — Officials confirmed three new sightings of Asian giant hornets in Whatcom County, increasing to 12 the number that have been reported there.

The Bellingham Herald reported the total represents the first sightings of the hornets in Washington state and the U.S. since they were first spotted in Whatcom in 2019.

All three recent sightings were found near Burk Road, southeast of Blaine, in late September, according to the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

Traps will be set up in the area. The goal is to catch live Asian giant hornets in those traps, tag them and track them back to their colony to destroy them so the invasive pests don't become established in Washington state.

Museum spares historic home with purchase

NH MANCHESTER — A historic New Hampshire mansion built by a wealthy industrialist has been saved from demolition by a last-minute sale to an art museum.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Manchester had applied for a permit in June to demolish Chandler House in Manchester after being unable to sell it. But a bid from city and community leaders to save the 19th-century home led to its sale to the Currier Museum of Art.

The museum plans to restore rooms on the main level of the house to their original appearance and conduct tours of those areas. The rest of the building will be renovated for office and classroom space.

The 30-room home was built by George Chandler, a banker and a philanthropist. More re-

cently, the house was the home of several bishops in the city and a convent for nuns from the nearby St. Hedwig Church. It hadn't been used for several years and had fallen into disrepair.

Man killed in dispute at haunted house entrance

MI PONTIAC — A dispute over cutting in line led to a fatal shooting outside a popular haunted house in southeastern Michigan, police said.

Investigators were looking for a suspect Monday after the early Sunday shooting at Erebus in Pontiac. The victim was Douglas Reese, 29, from Detroit.

"The victim and his girlfriend had been waiting in line to enter Erebus Haunted House when a male subject in line ahead of them would not move," the Oakland County sheriff's office said.

"The victim and the suspect exchanged words as the suspect thought the victim had cut in line ahead of him," the sheriff's office said.

Both men went to their vehicles and shots were heard. Reese was struck in the side, neck and chest, the sheriff's office said, and a witness reported that a blue sedan fled the scene at high speed.

Burglars access store from church next door

NE GRAND ISLAND — Burglars who cut through a cement wall stole more than \$250,000 in jewelry and other items from a Grand Island store, police said.

The burglars entered the Oro-Mex Jewelers late Friday or early Saturday. They went to Iglesia Profetica y Misionera church next door and cut

through the wall to enter the store. They then cut open two safes, police said.

The burglary caused about \$50,000 damage to the building, the Grand Island Independent reported.

Deputies: Man hid in teen's room for weeks

FL SPRING HILL — A Louisiana man found hiding in a Florida teenager's closet had been staying in the child's bedroom for more than a month, according to investigators.

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office charged Johnathan Lee Rossmoine, 36, with multiple sex crimes Sunday after deputies were called to a Spring Hill home by the parents of the teenager, who found Rossmoine in a closet in the child's bedroom, the agency announced Tuesday.

Rossmoine allegedly told deputies he traveled from Louisiana to Florida several times to have sexual encounters with the teen. Investigators said he had been in Hernando County for about five weeks when he was discovered.

Deputies said the two met online about two years ago, and the teen referred to Rossmoine as their boyfriend.

Authorities: Man leads police on 3-state chase

PA PITTSBURGH — A man who had just been released from a county jail in western Pennsylvania stole a vehicle and eventually led police on chase that went into West Virginia before he was finally captured in Ohio, authorities said.

The chase began shortly before noon Monday, when a work truck was reported stolen from a construction site in

Pittsburgh. The vehicle was soon stopped by police, but authorities said the driver, Shad Bocella, 24, drove off.

Authorities said an officer fired their weapon during the stop, though no one was hit by any shots. They did not say what sparked the gunfire.

Bocella then traveled on at least two interstate highways in Pennsylvania before he entered West Virginia shortly before 1 p.m. He soon crossed into Ohio, where state highway patrol officers took him into custody on Interstate 470.

Bear in national park euthanized; safety cited

AK DENALI NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE — A grizzly bear that was believed to have gotten into buildings and food storages over the last year has been euthanized amid safety concerns, according to Denali National Park and Preserve.

The adult male bear was captured Thursday, and wildlife staff with the park in Alaska recommended it be euthanized because of its persistent behavior and the amount of food it had accessed, a release from the park said Monday. The bear was deemed to be a safety concern for people and properties in the Wonder Lake and Kantishna area of the park.

"Removing a bear from the ecosystem is a rare event in Denali," Acting Superintendent Tom Medema said. "Our mandate is to preserve and protect both wildlife and human life, and these types of actions are very difficult and weigh heavily on park staff."

Asked if this was a matter of improper storage or a determined bear, park spokesperson G.W. Hitchcock said it was believed to be the latter.

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Playoff madness: 8 games in one day

Associated Press

Shortly after noon in Atlanta, Nick Senzel of the Cincinnati Reds slapped the first pitch from Max Fried to right field for a single, beginning a day of baseball unlike any that had come before.

Eight postseason games, all starting in a span of around 10 hours.

"This is like September Madness," Houston manager Dusty Baker said. "It's going to be mad."

Wednesday indeed had a bit of an NCAA Tournament feel, with a smorgasbord of playoff games starting early in the afternoon and lasting long into the night as the Yankees finished off Cleveland early Thursday in the longest nine-inning game in major league history.

For much of the 20th century, baseball had a maximum of seven games in any single postseason. Wednesday alone had more than that, the result of an expanded field for 2020 that included 16 teams after a regular season shortened to 60 games by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our country needs it. It's very therapeutic," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said before his team's night game against Milwaukee. "It's a diversion."

"September Madness" included baseball's version of a buzzer beater — a walk-off hit by Atlanta's Freddie Freeman — and two series victories by lower seeds. Although the Houston Astros and New York Yankees may not fit the public's definition of a Cinderella.

The last two games went well past 1 a.m.

Eastern time, and by the end of the night, baseball's Sweet 16 was reduced by three after the Minnesota Twins, Toronto Blue Jays and Cleveland Indians were eliminated. The final game of the night pitted the Los Angeles Dodgers, who had the game's best record in the regular season, against the sub-.500 Brewers. It was the type of matchup that invites criticism for this expanded playoff format, and there's no telling when or if the sport will have a day like Wednesday again.

For one day, however, it was quite a novelty, and the Reds were ready when they came to the plate. They swung at the game's first three pitches, hitting two singles to put men on first and third with nobody out. Then the Braves escaped the jam with no scoring, a sign of things to come.

NL wild-card roundup

Freeman drives Braves past Reds in 13th

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The scoreless innings kept piling up, along with the strikeouts. The shadows began to creep across the infield, and when the lights came on in a mostly empty stadium for a postseason game that began a little past noon, it seemed like this might go on forever.

Finally, Freddie Freeman had seen enough.

The MVP candidate who warded off a frightening bout with the coronavirus at the beginning of this most unusual season fittingly delivered the winning hit in the 13th inning, ending the longest scoreless duel in postseason history as the Atlanta Braves defeated the Cincinnati Reds 1-0 in the opener of their NL wild-card series Wednesday.

"That was a very stressful 4½ hours," Freeman said with a chuckle.

The East champion Braves won a postseason opener for the first time since Game 1 of the 2001 NL Division Series. They'll try to wrap up the best-of-three series Thursday and snap a record-tying streak of 10

straight playoff round losses.

"We're one away from winning it," said Atlanta starter Max Fried, who went seven scoreless innings and was just 7 years old the last time the Braves won a playoff series.

Marlins 5, Cubs 1: Miami just kept fighting. When Kyle Hendricks finally stumbled, the Marlins pounced.

Corey Dickerson hit a three-run homer off a fading Hendricks in the seventh inning, and Miami beat host Chicago in Game 1 of their NL wild-card series.

Jesus Aguilar also homered and Sandy Alcantara pitched three-hit ball into the seventh as the Marlins conjured up memories of past playoff magic in the franchise's first postseason game since it won the World Series in 2003. Miami, which rallied past the Cubs in a memorable NLCS that year, has never lost a playoff series.

This year's Marlins weren't supposed to make the playoffs, not after losing 105 games in 2019 and dealing with a coronavirus outbreak early this season. Dickerson said all the adversity helped turn them into a better team.

"We don't care about who's the hero," he said. "We want to pass the bat to the next guy. ... We don't care. We want to cheer for one another, play for one another. That's what makes this game fun."

Dodgers 4, Brewers 2: Mookie Betts had two hits and an RBI and Corey Seager homered in the opener of their NL wild-card series in Los Angeles.

The eight-time NL West champion Dodgers capitalized early in a bullpen game for Milwaukee and can wrap up the best-of-three series Thursday. The Brewers — a playoff entrant despite a losing record — limped into the postseason as the No. 8 seed without their best starter and reliever, who are hurt.

"A walk is just as good as a hit sometimes, which we showed in the first inning," Seager said. "You don't always have to have the big hit to score runs."

Los Angeles took a 2-0 lead on a leadoff double by Betts and four walks by left-hander Brent Suter in the first, tying for the most walks by a pitcher in a single inning in postseason history. Betts scored when Will

Smith drew a four-pitch walk with the bases loaded. Seager walked and scored on AJ Pollock's bases-loaded walk.

Cardinals 7, Padres 4: Paul Goldschmidt hit a two-run home run during a four-run first inning, St. Louis' bullpen held strong after starter Kwang Hyun Kim stumbled in his playoff debut and the Cardinals won at San Diego to ruin the Padres' long-awaited return to the playoffs in the opener of their NL wild-card series.

St. Louis got a welcome two days off before this series began. They came after a season-closing grind that saw them play 53 games in 44 days, including 11 doubleheaders, with only two days off.

"It was nice. We needed them," Goldschmidt said. "The whole last whatever, 45 days, we were playing every day, guys were playing as hard as they could but can't operate at 100% for that long. It was nice to kind of recharge and be 100% or close to it."

The Cardinals need one more win to eliminate the Padres from the postseason for the fourth time since 1996.

Renfroe powers Rays' rout of Jays

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Rays gathered in front of their dugout and posed for a celebratory team picture they're hoping will not be the last they take this postseason.

Hunter Renfroe hit a grand slam and the top-seeded Rays won a postseason series for the first time in 12 years, overpowering the young Toronto Blue Jays 8-2 Wednesday to finish a two-game sweep of their wild-card matchup.

Tampa Bay advanced to play the rival New York Yankees in a best-of-five AL Division Series beginning Monday in San Diego.

With a roster featuring just a handful of players who have posted impressive ré-

sumés so far, the AL East champs believe they're nowhere near finished.

"We've been confident since Day One. So if we put our heads down and just do what we've been doing and prepare like we've been preparing, the sky's the limit," winning pitcher Tyler Glasnow said.

Said manager Kevin Cash: "We have very good players first and foremost."

"I understand the back-of-the-baseball card stuff and some of our guys are not as established," he said. "What we do have, what makes it formidable is that the entire roster is used to help us win games. We do that consistently during the season and are definitely going to do it in the postseason."

Renfroe launched the first playoff grand slam in franchise history during a six-run

second inning. Glasnow kept the Rays ahead from there, allowing two runs — on a pair of homers by Danny Jansen — in six innings.

Mike Zunino hit a two-run homer off Blue Jays ace Hyun Jin Ryu during Tampa Bay's big inning. Manuel Margot and Randy Arozarena also drove in runs.

The next round will be played at Petco Park in San Diego. Renfroe is plenty familiar with the stadium — he hit 85 home runs in the previous three years for the Padres before being traded to the Rays last December.

Glasnow walked one and struck out eight before a small gathering of family and friends who were allowed to attend the series at Tropicana Field.

AL wild-card roundup

Yankees finish off Indians in five-hour game

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — It took the New York Yankees nearly five hours on the field, carried them from Wednesday to Thursday and September into October to complete the sweep.

They stumbled into the 2020 postseason. They're standing tall now.

DJ LeMahieu's tiebreaking single in the ninth inning off closer Brad Hand sent the Yankees into the AL Division Series — and a matchup with rival Tampa Bay — after a wild 10-9 win over the Cleveland Indians early Thursday in the longest nine-inning game in major league history.

"I'm 47 years old. I've watched a lot of baseball. I've watched a lot of my dad's playoff games, been in some really big games, and I don't know how you top that one — the back and forth, the amount of big plays," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "Tonight just had that feeling that these guys weren't going to be denied."

"They weren't going to lose."

At 4 hours, 50 minutes — even without two rain delays totaling another 76 minutes —

it was draining. It's no wonder after Aroldis Chapman got the final out well after 1 a.m. that the Yankees barely celebrated on the field. They observed COVID protocols and shared some fist bumps as they left.

"You don't have to pour champagne on each other to appreciate what an epic game that was and the fact that we're moving on," Boone said.

The Yankees will play the Rays in a best-of-five Division Series next week in San Diego.

New York went 2-8 during a testy season series with top-seeded Tampa Bay, which won the AL East by seven games over the second-place Yankees.

"They've been the best team in our league all year, so we're excited to play the best team and hopefully can have our way with them," Boone said.

LeMahieu, the AL batting champion during the shortened, 60-game regular season, grounded his hit into center field to score Gio Urshela, who hit a go-ahead grand slam earlier and made a huge defensive play at third base.

"That was one of the best games I've played in my life,"

Urshela said.

Down 9-8, the Yankees tied it in the ninth on Gary Sanchez's sacrifice fly off Hand, who went 16 of 16 on save tries during the season but was stung by a walk.

The Yankees were staggering last week. But their heavy-hitting lineup got rolling over two nights in chilly, mostly empty Progressive Field. New York pounded Cleveland ace Shane Bieber in the opener and now the Yankees, who hit seven homers in the series, have found their swing as the calendar flips to the month that defines them.

Astros 3, Twins 1: Carlos Correa hit a two-out, tiebreaking home run in the seventh inning for Houston, which produced another stifling pitching performance and a sweep, sending host Minnesota to a record 18th straight postseason loss.

Nine months after the Astros' rules-breaking, sign-stealing system was revealed, they advanced to the Division Series in Los Angeles. As the sixth seed, they'll face the Oakland Athletics or Chicago White Sox in a

best-of-five matchup starting Monday at Dodger Stadium.

Kyle Tucker hit two RBI singles for Houston and made a key throw from left field for the inning-ending out in the fifth.

Athletics 5, White Sox 3: Marcus Semien and Khris Davis homered early and host Oakland held off Jose Abreu and Chicago, sending their AL playoff series to a deciding Game 3.

A's reliever Jake Diekman walked home a run in the ninth, then retired the big-hitting Abreu on a sharp grounder to end it and even the best-of-three wild-card matchup at 1-all.

Game 3 was Thursday at the Coliseum.

The White Sox went 14-0 in the regular season against left-handed starters and beat southpaw Jesus Luzardo in the opener. Oakland manager Bob Melvin acknowledged it might make him reconsider who to start with the season on the line — perhaps righty Mike Fiers over lefty Sean Manaea.

Chris Bassitt allowed one run on six hits in seven-plus innings during an impressive postseason debut.

LeBron, Lakers batter Heat in Game 1

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — LeBron James finally got an easy Game 1 in the NBA Finals.

A very easy one, at that.

Anthony Davis scored 34 points, James had 25 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists and the Los Angeles Lakers rolled past the Miami Heat 116-98 on Wednesday night.

“The bigger the moment, he’s just raising his play,” Lakers coach Frank Vogel said about Davis, who was making his finals debut and made it look easy.

The Heat were left beaten and battered. Point guard Goran Dragic left in the second quarter and a person with knowledge of the situation said he was diagnosed with a torn plantar fascia in his left foot — which obviously jeopardizes his availability for the rest of the finals. And All-Star center Bam Adebayo left in the third quarter after apparently aggravating a left shoulder strain.

“We’re much better than we showed tonight,” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. “You have to credit the Lakers, and we’ll

get to work for the next one.”

Game 2 is Friday night.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 13 points, Danny Green had 11 and Alex Caruso finished with 10 for the Lakers. They returned to the finals for the first time in a decade and sent a very clear message. James’ teams had been 1-8 in Game 1 of past finals, with losses in each of the last seven openers.

Not this one.

“We kind of picked it up on both ends of the floor,” Davis said.

Jimmy Butler fought through a twisted left ankle to score 23 points for Miami. Kendrick Nunn added 18 points, Tyler Herro had 14 and Jae Crowder 12.

“I, and we, are here for him,” Butler said about Dragic. “We know how much he wants to win, how much he wants to go to war and battle with us. And obviously, we love him for that and we want him out there with us. But whatever the docs tell him to do, that’s what he’s got to do. ... He’s got to take care of himself first.”

Adebayo was held to eight points in 21 minutes, and Miami went with subs for a

fourth-quarter burst that turned a total rout into something only slightly more palatable in terms of final margin.

The Lakers did whatever they wanted. They outrebounded Miami 54-36, led by as many as 32 points, and made 15 three-pointers — a big number for a team that doesn’t necessarily count on piling up that many points from beyond the arc. They’re 21-3 this season when making at least 14 threes.

The only stretch that provided hope for Miami came in the first six minutes. The Heat scored on six consecutive possessions in what became a 13-0 run to take a 23-10 lead midway through the opening period.

So, the first six minutes were fine for Miami. Everything else was all Lakers.

“You have to get a feel for how hard Miami plays,” James said. “They smacked us in the mouth and we got a sense of that. ... From that moment when it was 23-10, we started to play to our capabilities.”

James became the seventh player to appear in 50 NBA Finals games and passed Michael Jordan and George Mikan for fifth in finals free throws made.

Kenin takes a while to win; Djokovic has an easy time

Associated Press

PARIS — Once Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin got going, she kept going — right into the third round of the French Open.

The fourth-seeded American started slowly Thursday under a closed roof on Court Philippe Chatrier before pulling out a 3-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory over Ana Bogdan.

“I knew I had to fight. She was playing well,” Kenin said. “First set just didn’t go my way. I couldn’t find my rhythm. I knew I needed to somehow change my game or else I’m going to be out. Did not want that, definitely.”

She also nearly stumbled at the end, too.

Kenin held three match points with Bogdan serving at 5-1 but failed to convert them all. In the next game, Kenin had to save three break points before finally winning on her fourth match point.

“I was getting a bit down on myself,” Kenin said. “But I guess it helped today.”

It was far easier for top-ranked Novak Djokovic when he followed Kenin on Chatrier. With the roof open and sunshine bathing the tournament’s biggest stadium after days of miserable weather, Djokovic routed Ricardas Berankis 6-1, 6-2, 6-2.

“I had less drop shots than the first match but I served very well today,” Djokovic said.

Roberto Carballes Baena advanced by beating ninth-seeded Denis Shapovalov 7-5, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 3-6, 8-6 in a match lasting five hours.

Carballes Baena will next play 18th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov, who has never reached the fourth round at Roland Garros.

Earlier, former champion Jelena Ostapenko advanced to the third round when she beat second-seeded Karolina Pliskova 6-4, 6-2.

Steelers-Titans postponed after 2 more positive tests

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The NFL postponed Sunday’s Pittsburgh Steelers game at Tennessee until later in the season after one additional Titans player and one personnel member tested positive for COVID-19.

The announcement Thursday came one day after the league said it hoped to play the game on Monday or Tuesday. The NFL said a new game date would be announced “shortly.”

“The decision to postpone the game was made to ensure the health and safety of players, coaches and game day personnel,” the league said. “The Titans facility will remain closed and the team will continue to have no in-person activities until further notice.”

On Tuesday, the Titans (3-0) placed three players on the reserve/COVID-19 list, including key players defensive captain and lineman DaQuan Jones

and long snapper Beau Brinkley. Outside linebacker Kamailei Correa became the fourth on that list Wednesday.

With the two new cases, the Titans’ total is now 11: five players and six other organization members. That doesn’t include outside linebackers coach Shane Bowen, whose positive result came back last Saturday, preventing him from traveling with Tennessee to Minnesota for a 31-30 win.

Coach Mike Vrabel said Wednesday he was not among the group of five personnel, but he declined to identify any of those people who tested positive. Vrabel said some of those who tested positive were experiencing “flu-like” symptoms.

Now the NFL has to figure out how to reschedule a game between two of its seven undefeated teams after the league’s first COVID-19 outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.