

Front-line soldiers defend Ukraine's east

The Washington Post

ROZADKY, Ukraine — Along Ukraine's eastern front, soldiers man the sprawling maze of trenches and bunkers that form the backbone of defensive positions that stretch for hundreds of miles.

Carved into the hard earth during eight years of bloody fighting, these rugged outposts are occupied by soldiers who have weathered intense shelling and artillery strikes battling Moscow-backed separatists to a standstill.

"Farther from here is only the enemy," said Andre, 23, an army officer who leads a unit at a deeply dug Ukrainian defensive position within range of enemy rifle fire. "It is only a matter of time before they send more of their forces."

That moment may now have arrived for Andre and his men, as Russian forces launch a new onslaught that threatens to encircle Ukrainian positions on this contested land.

On Monday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced that after days of amassing forces, the Kremlin has begun a large-scale offensive aimed at seizing what remains of Ukrainian-held territory in the country's eastern Donbas region. The governor of the Luhansk region, Serhiy Haidai,

announced Monday that the Ukrainian military had withdrawn from a town near the regional capital of Severodonetsk after weeks of intense Russian shelling.

Haidai urged civilians who remained near the fighting in and around the towns of Popasana and Kreminna to leave, warning them that "the Russians are killing everyone who's against them on the spot."

If the Russian offensive is successful, thousands of Ukrainian soldiers such as those dug into these front-line bunkers would be cut off from resupply lines. Soldiers and commanders interviewed here by *The Washington Post* in recent days said that if that happened, they would launch a fierce counteroffensive to fight their way out.

"We are fighting for our land, our country; forward toward victory is our only option," said Volodymyr, a 22-year veteran of the Ukrainian army.

Reporters from *The Post* visited four front-line positions along Ukraine's eastern front near the borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. They traveled to within a half-mile of Moscow-backed separatists' positions to assess the state of the war at these crucial Ukrainian defensive areas.

The *Post* was granted exclusive access to

Ukrainian forces defending the eastern front on the condition that reporters not identify units' specific locations or publish the full names of soldiers interviewed. While visiting the area on Saturday, nearby Ukrainian positions came under sustained artillery fire from areas controlled by separatist and Russian forces.

The landscape is dotted by a miles-long string of rudimentary military posts tucked into the rolling hills of the Donbas region. The thud of outgoing fire followed by the boom of exploding shells is a permanent feature.

Rough-cut timber lines muddy trenches of the observation posts staffed 24 hours a day. In one camouflaged dugout, a man on a heavy machine gun loaded with armor-piercing rounds waited; in another, a soldier scanned no man's land through a periscope.

"Out here on the front lines, we rely on each other. Everyone understands the mission. We know the guys over there at the next position are doing their jobs to hold the line — we won't let them down," said Sergii, 44.

"If we lose here in the Donbas, the Russians won't stop; they'll come next for the rest of Europe," he said, before returning to duty.

Army awards \$20.4 million to Sig Sauer for new rifle

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

The Army has awarded a 10-year, \$20.4 million contract to Sig Sauer to replace the service's M4 rifle with a new weapons system that officials said reduces aiming errors and brings the Army a new caliber of ammunition for the first time in 65 years.

After a 27-month decision process, the Army chose Sig Sauer over two other competitors to manufacture and deliver two variations of the Next Generation Squad Weapon, the XM5 Rifle, set to replace the M4/M4A1 carbine, and the XM250 Automatic Rifle, replacing the M249 Squad Automatic Weapon.

"The capability increase that these weapons provide over the M4 and the M249 is what's really exciting. It's significant," said Col. Scott Madore, project manager for soldier

lethality at Program Executive Office Soldier, the Army office that delivers new capabilities to soldiers. He spoke Wednesday during a news conference to discuss the contract alongside other officers who worked on acquiring the new squad rifle.

Both weapons use a 6.8 common cartridge family of ammunition, deviating from the Army's 5.56 ammunition that has been the standard for 65 years, said Brig. Gen. William Boruff, the executive officer of the joint program for armaments and ammunition. The new ammunition comes in multiple types of tactical and training rounds to increase accuracy, and are more lethal against the enemy than 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm ammunition.

"We've kind of maxed out [the] capability in the 5.56," Boruff said. "It gives us more capabilities to enhance the weapon in the future."

Overall, the Army said the new weapons offer capability improvements in accuracy, range and overall lethality. They are described as lightweight, mitigate recoil, provide improved barrel performance and include integrated muzzle sound and flash reduction.

About 25 rifles and 15 automatic rifles will reach the first group of soldiers toward the end of 2023 and continue to undergo testing, officials said. Close combat troops, such as infantry, cavalry scouts, forward observers, medics and combat engineers will get the new rifles first, while other soldiers will continue to use the M4 and M249.

The rifles will be paired with the XM157 Fire Control, an advanced fire control system that increases accuracy and lethality for close combat.

Austin speaks with Chinese counterpart

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday spoke with his Chinese counterpart for the first time since becoming Pentagon chief more than a year ago, breaking a communications impasse that American officials saw as increasingly dangerous amid concern that Beijing might provide military support for Russia's war in Ukraine.

Austin, who calls China the U.S. military's leading long-term challenge but has been forced to focus heavily on Russia this year, requested the telephone conversation with Gen. Wei Fenge after months of failed effort to speak with Gen. Xu Qiliang, the highest ranking uniformed officer in the Communist Party military structure.

Austin wanted to talk to Xu because, as

deputy chairman of the party's Central Military Commission, which controls the People's Liberation Army, Xu is more influential than Wei. But Beijing insisted on sticking to protocol and having Austin talk to Wei, who officially is his counterpart as defense minister but ranks below Xu in the hierarchy and has less military operational clout.

Austin's predecessors had typically spoken with Wei, most recently on Aug. 6, 2020, when then-Defense Secretary Mark Esper raised with him a U.S. request for greater transparency on the origins of COVID-19 and other issues.

Austin had no expectation of a major breakthrough on key issues with Wei when he made the call on a secure telephone link that was established by the Pentagon and China's Ministry of National Defense in 2008, accord-

ing to a senior defense official who was involved in the arrangement and spoke on the condition of anonymity in advance of the call.

In a brief statement after the call, the Pentagon said Austin and Wei discussed U.S.-Chinese defense relations, regional security issues and "Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine." It offered no details.

Austin intended the call, which lasted about 45 minutes, as a follow-up to President Joe Biden's video call with President Xi Jinping on March 18 in which he laid out stiff consequences the Chinese would face if they provided military or economic assistance for Russia's war in Ukraine. The White House gave no indication that Biden received any assurances from the Chinese leader, and it was not immediately clear how Wei responded Wednesday.

Marine Corps' Guam base contracts nearing \$1.5B

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

The Navy since January has awarded another \$308 million in building contracts at Camp Blaz, the new Marine Corps base on Guam, bringing the total spent on the project since October 2020 to \$1.5 billion.

Contracts approved in the past month include \$106 million to Black Construction Corp., of Guam, to build bachelor officer quarters; \$35 million to Gilbane Building Co., of California, for construction of an armory; \$36 million to Hensel Phelps Construction Co., of Hawaii, for a warehouse; and \$49 million to several businesses for

natural resource management projects, according to news releases from Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific.

The Navy awarded two contracts in January and February: \$38.7 million to APTIM Construction JV LLC, of Louisiana, to build a police station and \$44 million to Environmental Chemical Corp., of California, for a water well field at Andersen Air Force Base.

Blaz is part of an agreement between the U.S. and Japan to relocate some Marine Corps assets from Okinawa. Under the agreement, the Defense Policy Review Ini-

tiative, Japan is paying \$3 billion to build portions of the base.

Contracts for five more projects, including a public works and maintenance shop and an embarkation facility, are expected to go out for bid later this year, according to the engineering systems command's website. Those projects are estimated to be worth between \$275 million and \$800 million. Blaz, the Marine Corps' first new base to be activated since 1952, is expected to accommodate 5,000 members of the III Marine Expeditionary Force who are set to move in over the next five years from Okinawa.

Breast milk shipping costs are now covered by DOD

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN

Stars and Stripes

Nursing mothers in the U.S. military or the Defense Department civilian workforce now may be reimbursed up to \$1,000 to ship breast milk when on official travel for more than three days, under a revised Pentagon policy adopted earlier this month.

The joint travel regulations will be updated May 1 to specify that the cost of shipping breast milk can be compensated as a travel accommodation during temporary duty travel.

Volunteers from the Air Force's women's

initiative team have been pushing for the reimbursement for more than two years.

They had found that on average, 18% of active-duty airmen go on temporary duty orders within the first year of giving birth, team members said in a statement last year.

Calling the change "a huge step and great benefit," Maj. Samantha Sliney, the women's team co-lead, said in a statement Tuesday that the policy provides "the necessary support to continue accomplishing the mission while meeting the demands of parenthood."

Shipping breast milk can cost hundreds

of dollars, which can be unaffordable to young parents early in their military careers, the team said. The milk usually must be sent by express mail to ensure that it stays frozen.

The change, effective April 7, allows nursing mothers to claim the expenses in a travel voucher the same way they would with other reimbursable travel costs.

Expenses covered include excess baggage, disposable storage bags or nondurable containers, cold shipping packages, refrigeration and transport, according to the amended policy.

DOD's 'unfunded priorities' above \$21B

CQ Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Pentagon brass have asked Congress for nearly \$1 billion for anti-missile and cybersecurity programs that are not part of President Joe Biden's budget request, bringing to over \$21 billion the so-called unfunded priorities the armed services and military commands are seeking for fiscal 2023.

The Missile Defense Agency's \$748 million request to Congress and U.S. Cyber Command's \$236 million request, expressed in a pair of documents

obtained by CQ Roll Call, are the latest of a bevy of unfunded lists provided to Congress in recent weeks.

The lists have become a de facto addendum to each president's annual budget. They provide a way for lawmakers to know which military priorities could benefit from extra funds, and they bolster hawks' arguments that defense spending is not meeting all the military's needs.

While the documents are commonly known as "wish lists," Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., a

leading hawk, prefers to call them "risk lists."

The disagreement over terminology illustrates the divergent ways the requests are viewed. Some critics see them as institutionalizing excess in defense spending.

Byron Callan, an analyst with Capital Alpha Partners, a Washington-based consulting firm that conducts defense budget research, wrote in a note to investors this month that the billions of dollars on the unfunded lists are a "starting point" for what Congress is likely to add to the

defense budget for fiscal 2023.

More money will probably be added on top of the unfunded billions on the lists so that the defense budget can account for the amount by which inflation is expected to exceed the administration's projections for fiscal 2023, Callan noted.

The administration built the defense budget on an assumption of 4% inflation in defense, a measure that differs from the consumer price index. But defense inflation could be higher in fiscal 2023, though no one knows by how much.

NJ diocese agrees to \$87.5M deal to settle sex abuse suits

Associated Press

TRENTON, N.J. — A New Jersey Catholic diocese has agreed to pay \$87.5 million to settle claims involving clergy sex abuse with some 300 alleged victims in one of the largest cash settlements involving the Catholic church in the United States.

The agreement between the Diocese of Camden, which encompasses six counties in southern New Jersey on the outskirts of Philadelphia, and plaintiffs was filed with U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Camden on Tuesday.

The settlement must still go before a U.S. bankruptcy judge. If approved, it would exceed the nearly \$85 million settlement in 2003 in the clergy abuse scandal in Boston, although it's less than other settlements in California and Oregon.

"I want to express my sincere apology to all those who have been affected by sexual abuse in our Diocese," Bishop Dennis Sullivan said in a statement. "My prayers go out to all survivors of abuse and I pledge my continuing commitment to ensure that this terrible chapter in the history of the Diocese of Camden, New Jersey never happens again."

Details about what allegedly

happened to the victims were not included in the proposed settlement, according to an attorney for some 70 of the victims.

"This settlement with the Bishop of Camden is a powerful advance in accountability," said Jeff Anderson, an attorney representing 74 of the roughly 300 survivors. "The credit goes to the survivors for standing up for themselves and the truth."

The alleged sexual abuse occurred from the 1950s into the 1990s, Anderson said, but primarily unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s.

The diocese said the deal calls for setting up a trust, which will be funded over four years by the diocese and "related Catholic entities" to compensate survivors of sexual abuse. Part of the deal also requires maintaining or "enhancing" protocols to protect children.

Abuse survivors who filed a claim in the bankruptcy could get \$290,000, according to victims' attorneys Jay Mascolo and Jason Amala.

The agreement comes more than two years after New Jersey expanded the window of its civil statute of limitations to allow for victims of sexual abuse by priests to seek legal compensation.

Conviction in US a rare case of justice for victims of ISIS

The Washington Post

For French journalist Nicholas Henin, confronting the Islamic State militant who was among the men who held him hostage in a makeshift prison in Syria for nearly 10 months was a long time coming.

Sitting in the witness box in a federal courtroom in Virginia, Henin detailed the torture and pain he endured at the hands of a terrorist cell nicknamed "the Beatles," all while staring at El Shafee Elsheikh. Their eye contact was fleeting but important for Henin — occurring during a trial that was years in the making.

When Elsheikh and co-conspirator Alexandra Kotey were captured by Kurdish forces in early 2018 and identified as part of a group of militants that kidnapped, tortured and killed hostages for ISIS, it was unclear whether an American trial would happen at all. Britain did not want to prosecute Elsheikh or Kotey, both from London, and had stripped them of citizenship. But evidence in British hands that could be used against them in an American court was held up over disagreement on whether they should face the death penalty. And leaders at the Justice De-

partment feared that a loss at trial could leave U.S. officials with the thorny legal and political question of what to do with non-citizens whose home country wanted them banished.

Elsheikh's conviction last week on charges of kidnapping and murder is a welcome and rare case of justice for victims of ISIS and bolsters the argument for trying terrorists in federal court, said experts, survivors and families of those killed. Part of the reluctance to prosecute lies in the difficulty of securing evidence that proves crimes beyond membership in a terrorist group, said Stephen Rapp, former U.S. ambassador at large for war crimes issues in the State Department's Office of Global Criminal Justice.

"We spent so much blood and treasure to defeat ISIS; we really need to think about how this fits in with preventing them from rising again," said Rapp, who wants an international task force to coordinate terrorism prosecutions. "Let's document these crimes, let's show who's responsible."

"A terrorist crime opens a gaping wound in a society," Henin tweeted after the verdict. "Only justice can bring closure to such a monstrous chapter."

UK government to decide Assange extradition

Associated Press

LONDON — A British judge on Wednesday formally approved the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States to face spying charges. The case will now go to Britain's interior minister for a decision, though the WikiLeaks founder still has legal avenues of appeal.

The order, which brings an end to the yearslong extradition battle closer, comes after the U.K. Supreme Court last month refused Assange permission to appeal against a lower court's ruling that he could be extradited.

District Judge Paul Goldspring issued the order in a brief

hearing at Westminster Magistrates' Court, as Assange watched by video link from Belmarsh Prison and his supporters rallied outside the courthouse, demanding he be freed.

Home Secretary Priti Patel will now decide whether to grant the extradition.

The move doesn't exhaust the legal options for Assange, who has sought for years to avoid a trial in the U.S. on charges related to WikiLeaks' publication of a huge trove of classified documents more than a decade ago.

His lawyers have four weeks to make submissions to Patel, and can also seek to appeal to

the High Court.

Assange lawyer Mark Summers told the court that the legal team had "serious submissions" to make.

The U.S. has asked British authorities to extradite Assange so he can stand trial on 17 charges of espionage and one charge of computer misuse. American prosecutors have said Assange unlawfully helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal classified diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks later published, putting lives at risk.

Supporters and lawyers for Assange, 50, have argued he was acting as a journalist and is

entitled to First Amendment protections of freedom of speech for publishing documents that exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have argued that his case is politically motivated.

A British district court judge had initially rejected a U.S. extradition request on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. U.S. authorities later provided assurances that the WikiLeaks founder wouldn't face the severe treatment that his lawyers said would put his physical and mental health at risk.

Solomons leader defends new China security pact

Associated Press

BANGKOK — The Solomon Islands prime minister confirmed Wednesday that his government has signed a new security agreement with China, but told lawmakers it would not "undermine the peace and harmony of our region" as has been feared by the opposition and countries including the United States and Australia.

The security pact allows China to send police and military personnel to the Solomon Islands "to assist in maintaining social order," while also opening the door for Chinese warships to stop in port there for "logistical replenishment" — giving rise to worries of a possible Chinese naval base on the doorstep of Australia and New Zealand.

But in his address to parliament, Manasseh Sogavare defended the security agreement as being directed entirely to "our internal security situation." He said it complemented a 2017 security arrangement with Australia, under

which Australian police peacekeepers have been in the capital, Honiara, since riots in November.

"I ask all our neighbors, friends and partners to respect the sovereign interest of Solomon Islands on the assurance that the decision will not adversely impact or undermine the peace and harmony of our region," he told parliament.

Australia had urged the Solomon Islands not to sign the pact, and sent Sen. Zed Seselja, the minister for international development and the Pacific, for talks with Sogavare last week. Two top American officials — Kurt Campbell, the National Security Council Indo-Pacific coordinator, and Daniel Kritenbrink, the assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs — are set to visit the country this week for talks.

Sogavare has said his government would not let China build a military base, and China has denied seeking a military foothold in the South Pacific.

Japanese beef bowl exec fired over sexist remarks

Associated Press

TOKYO — A popular Japanese beef bowl chain, Yoshinoya Holdings Co., has fired an executive over sexist remarks he made about a marketing strategy aiming to get young women "hooked" on its products as though turning "virgins into drug addicts."

Masaaki Ito, a managing director at Yoshinoya, known for its "gyudon" beef-over-rice dish, made the inflammatory remarks at a marketing lecture at Tokyo's Waseda University on Saturday.

Gender disparity runs deep in Japan, where only a small percentage of women hold decision-making positions in fields such as business, academia and politics.

The comments made by a rising marketing strategist that only surfaced at a seminar outside the company suggest how gender bias and other forms of discrimination are still widespread and tolerated in the Japanese corporate world.

Ito was asking participants in the lecture to devise a market-

ing strategy that would "get country girls hooked on (Yoshinoya) like drug addicts while they are still naive virgins," according to a participant who complained about the remark on social media. Ito continued, saying "they won't eat (gyudon) once they start getting treated to expensive meals by men."

The participant who posted the message expressed disappointment and anger over the content of the lecture, which was part of an expensive course at a prestigious university.

Ito's comments quickly sparked outrage on Twitter and other social media, where people said the remarks insulted women as well as people from the countryside, prompting the company to apologize and dismiss Ito.

Yoshinoya, in a statement Monday, apologized for "causing trouble and unpleasant feelings." It said "the choice of words and expression used during the lecture were extremely inappropriate and could not be tolerated."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fraud victim finds suspect, calls police

FL STUART — When a Florida woman noticed fraudulent activity on her bank account, she began investigating on her own, and was able to track the man to a gas station. Then she called police. The woman first noticed the charges coming from a Wawa gas station, Stuart police said in a Facebook post.

She was able to find out that a man driving a white work truck had made the charges, police said. They didn't say how she got this information.

The woman went to the gas station and waited. A white work truck pulled up and began pumping gas, police said. She saw the man toss credit cards in the trash and at the same time was receiving fraudulent alerts from her bank. That's when she called 911.

Detectives later found multiple steel tanks in the back of the truck as well as other tanks hidden in the bed of the truck, the report said. They also found 28 fraudulent credit and debit cards in the truck.

Police capture offender who fled halfway house

CA SANTA ANA — Police captured a Southern California man who disappeared from a halfway house following an early release from prison five years after stabbing his mother to death, authorities said.

Ike Nicholas Souzer, 18, removed his electronic monitoring bracelet within hours of being moved to the halfway house in Santa Ana, according to the

Orange County District Attorney's office. Souzer was released that day from a maximum security jail.

Souzer was 13 when he stabbed his mother, Barbara Scheuer-Souzer, in 2017 at their home in Garden Grove. He was convicted in juvenile court of manslaughter in 2019.

While awaiting trial in 2019, Souzer found his way to a rooftop at the Orange County Juvenile Hall, vaulted a high perimeter fence, and was picked up by police later that day at a McDonald's.

Police: Robber entered via drive-thru window

NC WINSTON-SALEM — A knife-wielding woman robbed a Taco Bell restaurant in North Carolina by climbing through the drive-thru window and grabbing a cash drawer, police said.

Winston-Salem police said in a news release that the unidentified woman fled in a brown sport utility vehicle after robbing the fast-food restaurant.

The Winston-Salem Journal reported that the woman was swinging a large knife as she entered the restaurant through the window, then stole an undisclosed amount of money.

Teens pull driver from crash before ignition

NH NELSON — Two teenage brothers traveling with their family in New Hampshire pulled a driver out of a crashed pickup truck before the vehicle burst into flames, authorities said.

Vincent Heck, 19, and Jake Heck, 16, of Hillsboro, said

their family was traveling to Maryland when they saw the truck veer off Route 9 and crash into a rock, WMUR-TV reported.

"I immediately told my mom to pull over, and before she even stopped the vehicle, I jumped right out and ran over," Vincent said.

The teens pulled a man from the smoking truck before it ignited and performed CPR until the paramedics arrived at the scene, the news station reported.

Nelson Fire Chief Joseph Sarcione said the man is now recovering in the hospital.

Fire that destroyed businesses was arson

WA FRIDAY HARBOR — The Town of Friday Harbor on San Juan Island said that a fire that burned through a block of businesses recently was intentionally set.

City officials said the fire originated from a deck behind Crystal Seas Kayaking and was determined to be arson, KING-TV reported. Officials said the cause was determined by a National Response Team from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Four businesses — Herb's Tavern, Crows Nest Coffee Shoppe, Crystal Seas Kayaks and the Windermere Real Estate — were destroyed.

Researchers to study icy lake swimmers

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Researchers plan to study a group of Minnesotans who dunk themselves in

icy Lake Harriet every winter day.

The Star Tribune reported that researchers from Rockefeller University's Cohen Laboratory of Molecular Metabolism are studying so-called brown fat that generates heat in cold conditions in humans.

They're currently investigating possible links between controlled exposure to cold such as ice water dips or cold showers and improved health.

Starting this summer the researchers will collect blood from a group of 70 people who dip themselves in Lake Harriet at least twice a week for a month in winter. The researchers hope to compare molecules in their blood during the summer and winter months as well as their responses to anxiety, stress and depression.

International School closing after 22 years

LA BATON ROUGE — A small private school in Baton Rouge is closing after 22 years of operation, leaving parents looking for a place to enroll their children for next school year.

The Baton Rouge International School blamed a coronavirus pandemic-related drop in enrollment from which it never recovered as a reason for the closing, according to The Advocate. The school offered a full multilingual immersion program in English, Spanish, French and Chinese. It is part of a global network of 50 schools known as the International Schools Partnership.

The last day of classes is May 26.

— From wire reports



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Ingram, Pelicans even series with Suns

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Brandon Ingram's rolling, Devin Booker's hurting and the New Orleans Pelicans made it clear that this first-round playoff series will be a fight for the top-seeded Phoenix Suns.

Ingram had a fantastic all-around game with 37 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists to lead the Pelicans over the Suns 125-114 in Game 2 on Tuesday, pulling off the impressive road win to tie the series at 1-all and earn their first postseason victory since 2018.

As the final buzzer sounded, Pelicans forward Larry Nance Jr. set the ball down on the court and sprinted off the court and into the tunnel with his teammates.

Game 3 is on Friday in New Orleans.

"Good win. Let's go," Nance said. "Let's go home."

Not only did Phoenix lose the game, but the team is unsure about the health status of Booker, the All-Star guard who was spectacular in the first half with

31 points before leaving with right hamstring tightness in the third quarter.

The Suns — who led the NBA with a franchise-record 64 wins during the regular season — trailed 77-74 when he departed.

There wasn't much of an update on Booker's health or if the injury might keep him out beyond Tuesday. Phoenix guard Chris Paul said the injury was no excuse for the loss.

"We've got guys that are more than capable of stepping up," Paul said. "Book was killing. He was having a big-time game, but it is what it is."

The Suns kept the game close without their leading scorer and even took a lead early in the fourth, but the Pelicans rallied, getting big threes from Jose Alvarado, CJ McCollum and Ingram to take an advantage they didn't relinquish.

"Everything was flowing," Ingram said. "Everybody was effective on the floor, all five. All five made something happen, whether it was offensively or defensively. We were really con-

nected today."

McCollum finished with 23 points. Ingram added tough back-to-back jumpers in the closing minutes to keep a final Phoenix rally at bay.

"This is one of his best and it was on a big stage," New Orleans coach Willie Green said. "I'm proud of that young man. He works his tail off, he's a great teammate, high character, high IQ and he put it on display tonight."

Ingram finished 13-for-21 shooting from the field. The Pelicans shot 17-for-30 (57%) from three-point range.

The Suns certainly missed Booker in the final quarter, but spotty transition defense throughout the evening was a bigger culprit in the loss.

"That was probably, for us, the worst we have ever looked in transition since I have been here," Phoenix coach Monty Williams said. "For that to happen in a playoff game was a bit unsettling for everybody."

New Orleans admitted it was a little surprised by the intensity

of their Game 1 loss, especially during the first half when it fell into a 19-point halftime hole. They didn't make the same mistake on Tuesday, taking a 30-28 lead after one quarter.

The Suns rallied for a 61-56 halftime advantage thanks to Booker's scoring spree. He scored all of his 31 in the first half on 12-for-18 shooting, including 7-for-10 from three-point range. He hit a 30-footer just before the halftime buzzer after the Pelicans inexplicably left him open.

Booker's injury

Booker left the game and went to the locker room late in the third quarter. On the possession before he departed, he jumped to contest a fast-break shot by New Orleans, but it wasn't immediately clear that he was hurt.

He returned at the beginning of the fourth quarter wearing warmups and never re-entered the game. Booker missed multiple games earlier in the season with a hamstring injury.

Grizzlies, Morant dominate Timberwolves

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — The Memphis Grizzlies responded to losing their first game as a No. 2 seed by getting back to how they play.

The result? The largest margin of victory in franchise history in a playoff game and a near triple-double by Ja Morant.

The All-Star point guard scored 23 points, handed out 10 assists and grabbed nine rebounds as the Grizzlies looked much more like the team that posted the NBA's second-best record, routing the Minnesota Timberwolves 124-96 on Tuesday night to even up their first-round Western Conference series at 1 apiece.

Morant went to the bench

with 4:40 left to a huge ovation and teammates telling him how close he was to a triple-double.

"It was good to get that win," Morant said. "Obviously, you know, if you get a triple-double, it's hard to do it in this league, so that's special as well. But the win is the important thing, and we got that."

Memphis coach Taylor Jenkins said Morant showed great balance along with the bench outscoring the Timberwolves 60-43 and defense fueling the offense.

"This is our recipe ...," Jenkins said. "This is more the style that we got to play."

Desmond Bane and Jaren Jackson Jr. each added 16 with Jackson hitting 4 of 7 from three-point range. Seven Griz-

zlies finished in double figures with Brandon Clarke, Xavier Tillman Sr. and Ziaire Williams each having 13. Tyus Jones added 10.

Game 3 is Thursday night in Minneapolis.

Anthony Edwards, who scored 36 points in his playoff debut in Game 1, led Minnesota with 20. All-Star center Karl-Anthony Towns had 15 points and 11 rebounds. Naz Reid and Taurean Prince had 12 each off the bench, and D'Angelo Russell added 11.

"It shows just how physical and locked in you've got to be every single night regardless of the opponent," Towns said. "A small lapse, mental, and you see what the game comes out to be in the playoffs."

The Timberwolves dominated the series opener after scoring a franchise-record 41 points in the first quarter.

This time, officials stayed very busy, calling 20 fouls in a very long first quarter. That kept the NBA's top scoring teams in the regular season from getting into any rhythm as they combined to shoot 33 free throws.

Foul trouble forced Jenkins to turn to Tillman who didn't play in Game 1, and he turned in the best playoff game of his young career.

Memphis grabbed their biggest lead of this short series at 30-23 on a floater by Jones with 2:11 left, and it led 33-32 after the first quarter when Morant's long buzzer-beater attempt hit off the rim.

Heat defeat Hawks for 2-0 series lead

Associated Press

MIAMI — Jimmy Butler walked off the floor when his night's work was complete, lifted his arms in the air and heard a sold-out arena serenade him with screams.

That didn't happen in the bubble two years ago, since nobody was there.

But Butler was every bit as good Tuesday night as he was during that bubble run — and the Miami Heat needed all his heroics.

Butler scored a playoff career-high 45 points, including a personal 7-0 run down the stretch to decide the game, and

the Heat held off the Atlanta Hawks 115-105 in Game 2 of their Eastern Conference first-round series Tuesday night.

"We go as he goes," Miami guard Gabe Vincent said.

Butler was 15-for-25 from the floor, 11-for-12 from the line and 4-for-7 from three-point range. As such, the top-seeded Heat are going to Atlanta with a 2-0 lead.

Tyler Herro scored 15 for Miami, while Max Strus scored 14 and Vincent added 11 for the top-seeded Heat.

Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 19 of his 29 points in the fourth quarter for the Hawks. Trae Young got his scoring touch

back — he had 25 points in Game 2, after being held to eight in Game 1 — but also had a career-worst 10 turnovers for eighth-seeded Atlanta.

"If the refs are going to let them be as physical as they are and not call fouls, it's going to be hard to really do anything anyways," Young said.

De'Andre Hunter had 16 and John Collins finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds for the Hawks.

Butler's previous playoff best was 40, done twice, both in the bubble when the Heat made the 2020 NBA Finals. Miami needed all of his heroics then, and it

needed them all on Tuesday as well.

Bogdanovic's three-pointer with 3:15 left got Atlanta within 104-101.

From there, it was all Butler.

"Big-time basketball from a big-time basketball player, one of the best two-way players in the game," Heat guard Kyle Lowry said.

Butler had a dunk, a three-pointer and another dunk — all in the span of 56 seconds — to turn things from in doubt to locked down, putting Miami up 10 with 1:20 remaining and ensuring the Heat would finish off the win.

Rangers blank Jets to record third straight shutout

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ryan Strome scored twice, Adam Fox added a goal and Igor Shesterkin made 31 saves as the New York Rangers recorded a third-straight shutout and their 50th win of the season, 3-0 over the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday night.

"It's a nice accolade, means a lot for our team," Strome said of the 50-win mark achieved for just the fifth time in the team's history. "We just come to the rink every day with a fresh mindset about the next game."

Shesterkin was stellar from the start, making six saves in the first, 12 in the second and 13 in the third. The shutout was his second straight and sixth of the season. He also blanked Detroit 4-0 on Saturday after backup Alexander Georgiev stopped Philadelphia 4-0 on April 13.

The Rangers reached the 50-win mark for the fifth time in franchise history and the first time since 2014-15, when they won a franchise-record 53 games. They also reached the plateau in 1991-92, 1993-94 and 2011-12.

With the victory, New York moved into a first-place tie with

idle Carolina with 106 points atop the Metropolitan Division. Both teams have five games remaining, including another meeting at Madison Square Garden next Tuesday.

Kings 2, Ducks 1: Phillip Danault scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period, and host Los Angeles solidified its grasp on a playoff spot with a victory over Anaheim.

Jonathan Quick made 29 saves in a frequently spectacular performance, and Adrian Kempe scored the first goal in the Kings' third victory in four games. Los Angeles is closing in on the end of its three-season playoff drought, moving five points clear of Vegas for third place in the Pacific Division.

Panthers 3, Islanders 2 (OT): Aleksander Barkov had his third career hat trick, leading Florida to an overtime victory at New York.

Sergei Bobrovsky made 24 saves and the Eastern Conference-leading Panthers extended their win streak to 11 games. Jonathan Huberdeau added three assists.

Maple Leafs 5, Flyers 2: William Nylander scored his career-high 32nd goal of the sea-

son and Jack Campbell made 36 saves in his 30th win of the year as host Toronto defeated Philadelphia.

Timothy Liljegren, Jason Spezza and David Kampf scored, and Ilya Mikheyev added an empty-net goal for the Maple Leafs. Nylander and Mikheyev each added an assist.

Red Wings 4, Lightning 3: Jakub Vrana had two goals, including the tiebreaking score in the third period, to lead Detroit to a win at Tampa Bay.

The Red Wings beat Lightning goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy for the first time in 14 career games.

Wild 2, Canadiens 0: Cam Talbot had his third shutout of the season to help Minnesota win at Montreal.

Talbot made 26 saves as the Wild (48-21-7) swept the season series between the teams. Kevin Fiala scored and assisted on Matt Boldy's goal in the third period.

Bruins 3, Blues 2 (OT): Charlie McAvoy scored 48 seconds into overtime and Jeremy Swayman made 20 saves, leading Boston to a victory at St. Louis.

Jake DeBrusk and Taylor

Hall also scored for the Bruins, who won their second straight after a season-worst three-game losing streak.

Predators 3, Flames 2 (SO): Matt Duchene scored his 40th goal of the season and Mikael Granlund had the only goal of the shootout to lead host Nashville over Calgary.

Filip Forsberg also scored and Juuse Saros made 19 saves in regulation and overtime for the Predators, winners of two of their past three games.

Senators 4, Canucks 3 (SO): Adam Gaudette scored the shootout winner in the fifth round and visiting Ottawa ended Vancouver's six-game winning streak.

Alex Formenton had a pair of goals in regulation for the Senators. Parker Kelly also scored and Nikita Zaitsev had two assists.

Sharks 3, Blue Jackets 2: Scott Reedy had his first career two-goal game and host San Jose snapped a 10-game winless streak by beating Columbus.

Rudolf Balcers also scored and Kaapo Kahkonen made 22 saves to help the Sharks snap their longest skid since losing 10 straight in November 2005.

Fried, Jansen mow down Dodgers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Max Fried looked right at home and Kenley Jansen was up to his old tricks on the Dodger Stadium mound.

Fried opened with five perfect innings and Jansen closed for a save against his former team Tuesday night as the duo pitched the Atlanta Braves to a 3-1 victory over Los Angeles that snapped the Dodgers' seven-game winning streak.

Fried, a Los Angeles-area native, made his sixth career start at Dodger Stadium including playoff games. He did not allow a baserunner until Hanser Alberto led off the bottom of the sixth with a line-drive single to right field.

In seven scoreless innings of work, Fried (1-2) gave up two hits with eight strikeouts and no walks.

"I've definitely had some rough ones here, so to be able to come out and have a good start and put us in position to win, that was my goal," Fried said.

Mets 3-5, Giants 1-4: Max Scherzer pitched no-hit ball into the sixth inning of his anticipated home debut and the host Mets rode their \$130 million ace to a 3-1 victory over the San Francisco for a double-header sweep.

Scherzer (3-0) was overpowering for 5½ innings before seeming to hit a wall. His velocity dipped and control wavered over consecutive walks to Mike Yastrzemski and Brandon Belt, and then Darin Ruf ripped an RBI single for the Giants' first hit.

In the first game, the Mets won 5-4 as Francisco Lindor lined a walk-off single in the 10th after a big stretch by Pete Alonso bailed him out in the top of the inning.

Lindor's single to center against Jarlín García (1-1) scored automatic runner Brandon Nimmo from third.

A half-inning earlier, Lindor's throw on Thairo Estrada's grounder pulled Alonso off the bag at first base, apparently allowing Brandon Belt to score. Replays showed Alonso just barely held the base with his right foot, and umpires overruled the safe call. That kept Adam Ottavino (1-0) in line for the win.

Rays 6, Cubs 5: Wander Franco hit his first homer of the season, a two-run drive to left-center in the third inning, and Tampa Bay held on to win at Chicago.

Cubs rookie Seiya Suzuki drew three walks but his nine-game hitting streak came to an end, leaving him tied with Akinori Iwamura for the longest hitting streak by a Japanese-born player to start a career.

Opener Matt Wisler got the first five outs for the Rays and Josh Fleming (2-1) worked the next 3½ innings, allowing three runs on four hits. Andrew Kittredge, the sixth Rays pitcher, retired the final six Chicago batters for his second save.

Nationals 6-1, Diamondbacks 1-0: Victor Robles had Washington's first hit, an RBI double off Madison Bumgarner with two outs in the fifth inning, and Washington beat Arizona 6-1 in the opener of a double-header.

In the second game, Washington won 1-0 as Joan Adon became the first Nationals starter to finish six innings in 2022, throwing 6½ scoreless.

Yankees 4, Tigers 2: Gerrit Cole lasted a career-low 1½ innings, but Clarke Schmidt combined with four relievers to pitch three-hit shutout ball and lead New York to a win at Detroit.

Cole matched his career high of five walks and allowed two runs and one hit — a single by the Tigers' Miguel Cabrera, his 2,996th hit.

Brewers 5, Pirates 2: Corbin Burnes struck out 10 and allowed two runs in seven

innings as host Milwaukee beat Pittsburgh.

The Brewers had a season-low three hits but won their third straight. The Pirates had a season-low four hits.

Rockies 6, Phillies 5: C.J. Cron hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the seventh inning and host Colorado beat Philadelphia.

Rockies starter Kyle Freeland agreed to a \$64.5 million, five-year contract with his hometown team earlier in the day and left with the lead after five innings. He gave up two runs on six hits and struck out three.

Red Sox 2, Blue Jays 1: Connor Wong drove in the tiebreaking run with a sacrifice fly in the seventh inning, and host Boston beat Toronto bay despite being held to three hits.

Royals 4, Twins 3: Salvador Perez homered twice and Hunter Dozier hit another go-ahead home run to lift host Kansas City over Minnesota.

Padres 6, Reds 2: Manny Machado homered for the second consecutive game, Joe Musgrove pitched into the seventh inning and host San Diego handed Cincinnati its eighth straight loss.

Mariners 6, Rangers 2: Robbie Ray pitched six strong innings to win his home debut, Eugenio Suárez hit a three-run home run in the first and host Seattle beat Texas.

Cardinals 5, Marlins 1: Albert Pujols had two hits and scored twice as St. Louis won at Miami.

Angels 7, Astros 2: Jo Adell tied a career high with three hits, and Kurt Suzuki and Brandon Marsh drove in two runs each as Los Angeles won at Houston.

Athletics 2, Orioles 1: Seth Brown hit a two-run double in the sixth inning, Cristian Pache made another spectacular defensive play in center field and host Oakland edged Baltimore before its smallest home crowd in 42 years.

Wimbledon bans Russian, Belarusian players

Associated Press

LONDON — Tennis players from Russia and Belarus will not be allowed to play at Wimbledon this year because of the war in Ukraine, the All England Club announced Wednesday.

Among the prominent players affected by the ban are reigning U.S. Open champion Daniil

Medvedev, who recently reached No. 1 in the ATP rankings and is currently No. 2; men's No. 8 Andrey Rublev; Aryna Sabalenka, who was a Wimbledon semifinalist in 2021 and is No. 4 in the WTA rankings; Victoria Azarenka, a former women's No. 1 who has won the Australian Open twice; and Anastasia Pav-

lyuchenkova, the French Open runner-up last year.

Medvedev, Rublev and Pavlyuchenkova are from Russia; Sabalenka and Azarenka are from Belarus.

Wimbledon begins on June 27. The All England Club confirmed in March that it was having discussions with the British

government about whether Russians should be able to play in the grass-court Grand Slam tournament.

Russian athletes have been prevented from competing in many sports following their country's invasion of Ukraine. Belarus has aided Russia in the war.