

Final US aircraft leave Afghanistan

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — American forces have flown their final flight out of Kabul, marking the end of nearly 20 years in Afghanistan, the top U.S. commander in the region said Monday.

The last American troops left Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul shortly before midnight Tuesday, meeting the Aug. 31 withdrawal deadline that President Joe Biden set and Taliban leaders threatened to enforce, said Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, commander of U.S. Central Command.

"I'm here to announce the completion of our withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of the military mission to evacuate American citizens, third-country nationals and vulnerable Afghans. The final U.S. C-17 transport aircraft left Kabul at 11:59 p.m. local time," McKenzie said, noting the flight was "now clearing the airspace above Afghanistan" as he spoke to reporters at the Pentagon.

"This withdrawal signifies both the end of the military component of the evacuation, but also the end of the nearly 20-year mission that began in Afghanistan shortly after Sept. 11, 2001," he said.

Shortly after McKenzie's announcement, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said

on Twitter that celebratory gunfire erupted in the streets after Afghanistan "gained full independence" when "the last American soldier left Kabul airport."

"The sounds of gunfire in Kabul are shots of joy at the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and citizens are not worried," he said.

That last soldier was Maj. Gen. Chris Donahue, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division and XVIII Airborne Corps, according to a Pentagon tweet. A night-vision photo accompanying the message shows Donahue boarding a C-17.

Though all U.S. troops have withdrawn from Afghanistan, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said fewer than 200 and "likely closer to 100" Americans who wanted to leave the country were left behind.

"We did not get everybody out that we wanted to get out, but I think if we'd stayed another 10 days, we [still] wouldn't have gotten everybody out that we wanted to get out and there still would have been people who would have been disappointed with that," McKenzie said. "It's a tough situation."

There were no American evacuees on the final flights leaving Kabul during the last 12 hours of operations because none of them could get to the airport, the general said.

The State Department will continue trying to extract those Americans and "negotiate ve-

ry hard and aggressively" to help Afghans to come to the U.S., McKenzie said.

U.S. withdrawal efforts began May 1 when about 2,500 troops were deployed in the country, the Pentagon said at the time. That number was increased to about 5,800 in the draw-down's final two weeks as the U.S. ramped up its evacuation efforts to remove Americans, Afghans seeking special immigrant visas and others from the country once the Taliban took control Aug. 15.

"On average, we have evacuated more than 7,500 civilians per day over the 18 days of the [evacuation] mission, which includes 16 full days of evacuations [and] more than 19,000 on a single day," McKenzie said.

U.S. and coalition forces ultimately evacuated more than 123,000 people from Afghanistan since late July, said Army Maj. Gen. Hank Taylor, the Joint Staff's deputy director for regional operations.

The final days of the withdrawal were marked by the deaths of 11 Marines, a sailor and a soldier and dozens of Afghans when an Islamic State terrorist wearing an explosive vest detonated it near the airport's Abbey Gate and ISIS gunmen fired on the crowds, the Pentagon has said. In response, the U.S. on Friday killed two ISIS-Khorasan terrorists and injured a third in a drone strike, defense officials reported Saturday.

Taliban declare victory from airport in Kabul

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban triumphantly marched into Kabul's international airport on Tuesday, hours after the final U.S. troop withdrawal that ended America's longest war. Standing on the tarmac, Taliban leaders pledged to secure the country, quickly reopen the airport and grant amnesty to former opponents.

In a show of control, turbaned Taliban leaders were flanked by the insurgents' elite Badri unit as they walked across the tarmac. The commandos in camouflage uniforms proudly posed for photos.

Getting the airport running again is just one of the sizeable challenges the Taliban face in governing a nation of 38 million people that

for two decades had survived on billions of dollars in foreign aid.

"Afghanistan is finally free," Hekmatullah Wasiq, a top Taliban official, told The Associated Press on the tarmac. "The military and civilian side (of the airport) are with us and in control. Hopefully, we will be announcing our Cabinet. Everything is peaceful. Everything is safe."

Wasiq also urged people to return to work and reiterated the Taliban pledge offering a general amnesty. "People have to be patient," he said. "Slowly we will get everything back to normal. It will take time."

Just hours earlier, the U.S. military had wrapped up its largest airlift of non-combatants in history.

On Tuesday morning, signs of the chaos of recent days were still visible. In the terminal, rifled luggage and clothes were strewn across the ground, alongside wads of documents. Concertina wire still separated areas while overturned cars and parked vehicles blocked routes around the civilian airport — a sign of measures taken to protect against possible suicide car bombers entering the facility.

Vehicles carrying the Taliban raced back and forth along Hamid Karzai International Airport's sole runway on the military side of the airfield. Before dawn broke, heavily armed Taliban fighters walked through hangars, passing some of the seven CH-46 helicopters the State Department used in its evacuations before rendering them unusable.

Louisiana begins to face Ida's aftermath

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana communities beginning the huge task of clearing debris and repairing the damage inflicted by Hurricane Ida are facing the dispiriting prospect of weeks without electricity in the oppressive, late-summer heat.

Ida ravaged the region's power grid, leaving all of New Orleans and hundreds of thousands of other Louisiana residents in the dark with no clear timeline on when the electricity would come back on. Some areas outside New Orleans also suffered major flooding and damage to homes and businesses.

"I can't tell you when the power is going to be restored. I can't tell you when all the debris is going to be cleaned up and repairs made," Gov. John Bel Edwards said Monday. "But what I can tell you is we are going to work hard every day to deliver as much assistance as we can."

The storm was blamed for at least four deaths in Louisiana and Mississippi, including two people killed Monday night when seven vehicles plunged into a 20-foot-deep hole near Lucedale, Miss., where a highway had collapsed after torrential rains.

On Monday, rescuers in boats, helicopters and high-water trucks brought more than 670 people in Louisiana trapped by floodwaters to safety. An additional 20 people were rescued in Mississippi. Crews planned to go door to door in hard-hit areas to make sure everyone

got out safely.

Also stuck in New Orleans were tourists who didn't get out before the storm. The airport canceled all incoming and outgoing commercial flights for a third day, saying the lack of power and water meant no air conditioning or restrooms.

Adding to the misery was the steamy weather. A heat advisory was issued for New Orleans and the rest of the region, with forecasters saying the combination of high temperatures and humidity could make it feel like 105 degrees Fahrenheit on Tuesday and 106 on Wednesday.

Power crews rushed into the region. Louisiana's governor said 25,000 utility workers were on the ground in the state to help restore electricity, with more on the way.

Still, his office described damage to the power grid as "catastrophic," and power officials said it could be weeks before electricity is restored in some spots.

More than 1 million homes and businesses in Louisiana and Mississippi were left without power as Ida pushed through on Sunday with winds that reached 150 mph. The wind speed tied it for the fifth-strongest hurricane ever to hit the mainland.

A giant tower that carries key transmission lines over the Mississippi River to the New Orleans area twisted and collapsed in the storm, and power company Entergy said more than 2,000 miles of transmission lines were

knocked out of service along with 216 substations. The storm also flattened utility poles, toppled trees onto power lines and caused transformers to explode.

In New Orleans, city officials told residents without power there was no reason to stay or return, at least for a few days.

Pamela Mitchell said she was thinking about leaving while she waited for the power to come back on, but her 14-year-old daughter, Michelle, was determined to stay and decided to clean out the refrigerator and put perishables in an ice chest.

Mitchell had already spent a hot and frightening night at home while Ida's winds shrieked, and she thought the family could tough it out.

"We went a week before, with Zeta," she said, recalling an outage during the hurricane that hit the city last fall.

Some places are also facing shortages of drinking water. Eighteen water systems were out, affecting more than 312,000 people, and an additional 14 systems serving 329,000 people were under boil-water advisories, the governor said.

Hurricane Ida blew ashore on the 16th anniversary of Katrina, the 2005 storm that breached New Orleans' levees, devastated the city and was blamed for 1,800 deaths.

This time, New Orleans, protected by a major overhaul of its levees since Katrina, escaped the catastrophic flooding some had feared.

Calif. fire nears Lake Tahoe after mass evacuation

Associated Press

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. — A ferocious wildfire swept toward Lake Tahoe on Tuesday, just hours after roads were clogged with fleeing cars when the California resort city of South Lake Tahoe was ordered to evacuate, and communities across the state line in Nevada were warned to get ready to leave.

The popular vacation haven normally filled with tens of thousands of summer tourists emptied out Monday as the massive Caldor Fire rapidly expanded. Vehicles loaded with bikes and camping gear and hauling boats were in gridlock traffic, stalled in hazy, brown air that smelled like a campfire. Police and other emergency vehicles whizzed by.

"It's more out of control than I thought," evacuee Glen Naasz said of the fire that by late Monday had been pushed by strong winds

across California highways 50 and 89, burning mountain cabins as it swept down slopes into the Tahoe Basin.

Additional strike teams arrived just after dark and many of the new firefighters were immediately dispatched to protect homes in the Christmas Valley area about 10 miles from South Lake Tahoe, said fire spokesman Dominic Polito.

"We're flooding the area with resources," he said. "Wherever there are structures, there are firefighters on the ground."

Ken Breslin was stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic less than a mile from his home in the city of 22,000, with only a quarter-tank of gas in his Ford Escape. His son begged him to leave Sunday night, but he shrugged him off, certain that if an evacuation order came, it would be later in the week.

"Before, it was, 'No worries ... it's not going to crest. It's not gonna come down the hill. There's 3,500 firefighters, all those bulldozers and all the air support,'" he said. "Until this morning, I didn't think there was a chance it could come into this area. Now, it's very real."

As flames churned toward South Lake Tahoe, residents just over the state line in Douglas County, Nev., were under evacuation warnings.

Monday's fresh evacuation orders, unheard of in the city, came a day after communities several miles south of the lake were abruptly ordered to leave as the fire raged nearby. South Lake Tahoe's main medical facility, Barton Memorial Hospital, proactively evacuated dozens of patients, and the El Dorado Sheriff's Office transferred inmates to a neighboring jail.

US teachers push back on vaccine mandates

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Some of the biggest school systems in the United States are taking a hard line with teachers and staff members who are not yet vaccinated against COVID-19: Get a jab or lose your job.

Most teachers already are vaccinated and national teachers' unions have endorsed vaccine mandates, but the policies have sparked protests from educators and, in some cases, pushback from local district leaders who fear large numbers of departures.

In Oregon, where school staffers statewide are required to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 18, the board for the 7,500-student district of Redmond last week passed a resolution protesting the mandate and mandatory mask-

wearing in schools after "significant" opposition.

"This could do serious damage to the other mandate that we have, which is to provide excellent education to the children and the families of our district," board member Michael Summers said. "We're attempting to speak for people."

Teachers in many school districts with vaccine requirements can opt out as long as they submit to regular testing for the coronavirus, but New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago and St. Louis are among a growing list of places that are limiting exemptions to bona fide medical and religious reasons. Washington and Oregon have adopted similarly strict vaccination policies statewide.

As a new school year begins, governments are taking a harder

line on vaccinations to ward off the highly contagious delta variant, which has sent children to hospital intensive care beds in record numbers. Many students are too young to get the vaccine, which is available only to those 12 and over.

"This is to ensure that the children we all cherish are safe, that their families are reassured," New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, said last week.

Underscoring the risks of classroom infections, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention presented a case study in its weekly report Friday detailing how an unvaccinated teacher in Marin County, Calif., spread the virus to 22 of the instructor's 24 students at school. The CDC said the teacher sometimes read aloud to the students

while unmasked.

Some school staff members who have held off on getting vaccinated say they would leave their jobs before taking the shots.

Marlene Washington, an elementary school teacher in New York City, said as she protested de Blasio's order outside City Hall last week that she is considering retirement after two decades in the classroom. She said she questions the long-term safety of the vaccines.

"I'm still undecided about what to do," said Washington, 62. "But I do know that I'm not taking the vaccine."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration last week gave full approval to Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine, citing months of real-world evidence that serious side effects are extremely rare.

Male witness describes sexual abuse by R. Kelly

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After several days of testimony from women claiming they were groomed and sexually abused by R. Kelly, a man took the witness stand at Kelly's sex-trafficking trial in New York City on Monday to say the R&B star exploited him in the same way when he was a high school student.

The witness, testifying in federal court in Brooklyn without using his real name, told a jury how Kelly lured him to his Chicago-area home in 2007 with false offers of helping him with his fledgling music career.

Kelly asked the alleged victim, then 17, "what I was willing to do for music," the witness said. He replied, "I'll carry your bags ... Anything you need."

"That's not it. That's not it," he said Kelly responded before asking him if he ever fantasized about having sex with men. He said Kelly then "crawled down on his knees and proceeded to give me oral sex," even though, "I

wasn't into it."

He kept seeing Kelly after that because "I really wanted to make it in the music industry," he said.

The witness was testifying as part of a cooperation agreement stemming from his guilty plea in a separate case alleging he was part of a botched scheme to bribe a woman to not testify against Kelly. Kelly, 54, has repeatedly denied accusations that he preyed on victims during a 30-year career highlighted by his 1996 mega hit "I Believe I Can Fly."

Earlier Monday, a woman testified that Kelly sexually assaulted her at age 17 following a performance in Miami in 1994.

On cross-examination, defense attorney Deveraux Cannick pressed the witness, also testifying without using her real name, on why, after someone allegedly "raped you," she waited more than two decades to contact law enforcement.

"Because I didn't want to feel more shame and trauma," she said.

China limits kids to 3 hours of online gaming per week

Associated Press

BEIJING — China is banning children from playing online games for more than three hours a week, the harshest restriction so far on the gaming industry as Chinese regulators continue cracking down on the technology sector.

Minors in China can only play games between 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Fridays, weekends and on public holidays starting Sept. 1, according to a notice from the National Press and Publication Administration.

That limits gaming to three hours a week for most weeks of the year, down from a previous restriction set in 2019 that allowed minors play games for an hour and a half per day and three hours on public holidays.

The new regulation affects some of China's largest technology companies, including gaming giant Tencent, whose Honor of Kings online multiplayer game is hugely popular globally, as well as gaming company

NetEase.

Tencent's stock price closed down 0.6% at 465.80 Hong Kong dollars on Monday ahead of the regulator's announcement.

Its market capitalization of \$573 billion is down more than \$300 billion from its February peak, a decline equal to more than the total value of Nike Inc. or Pfizer Inc.

New York-listed NetEase's stock was down about 9% at the market's open.

The gaming restrictions are part of an ongoing crackdown on technology companies, amid concerns that technology firms — many of which provide ubiquitous messaging, payments and gaming services — may have an outsized influence on society.

In early August, Tencent said it would limit gaming time for minors to an hour a day and two hours during holidays, as well as ban children under the age of 12 from making in-game purchases.

USFK surge of new cases: 40 in 2 days

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — U.S. Forces Korea on Tuesday announced the fastest surge of new coronavirus cases among its personnel, surpassing a record set in July.

Forty people, including U.S. military family members and South Korean contractors, tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday and Friday, the command said in a news release.

The previous record was 37 infections over a three-day span between July 5 and 7.

Fifty-one USFK personnel tested positive between Aug. 23 and Friday, which is, so far, fewer than the previous record of 58 cases during a weeklong period in July.

The figures only represent personnel who were already stationed in South Korea and do not include recent arrivals into the country.

Nearly half of the recent

cases are service members at Osan Air Base, roughly eight miles north of Camp Humphreys, the largest U.S. military base overseas. Nineteen of the 40 positive cases originated at the air base, while two cases were reported at Humphreys.

The remaining cases include one contractor and 18 service members on temporary duty in South Korea.

USFK did not specify where those individuals are posted; the command “does not publi-

cly discuss specific details about confirmed cases,” according to a statement to Stars and Stripes on Tuesday.

All of the infected personnel were moved to isolation buildings at Humphreys, Osan or a South Korean medical facility.

USFK on Tuesday said it “remains at a high level of readiness” with over 80% of its personnel being fully vaccinated and less than 1% of its active-duty force confirmed positive.

US military in Japan has 75 new virus cases

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — U.S. military installation across Japan announced 75 new cases of the coronavirus respiratory disease on Tuesday, mostly at Marine Corps bases on Okinawa.

Meanwhile, Japan’s capital city recorded a ninth consecutive day of a comparative decline in new cases of coronavirus, evidence that the city’s fifth pandemic wave may be cresting.

Another 2,909 people tested positive in Tokyo, according to public broadcaster NHK, which cited the metropolitan government. That’s 1,311 fewer cases than a week prior, according to metro government data. Fifteen more people also died Tuesday.

Forty of the U.S. military’s cases were discovered since

Monday within the Marine Corps community on Okinawa, according to a Facebook post by Marine Corps Installations Pacific.

Another 29 have surfaced since Friday at Yokosuka Naval Base, 28 miles south of central Tokyo. They consist of 12 unimmunized and 17 immunized people according to a base news release. The base has 55 active cases.

Nearby Naval Air Station Atsugi had one person test positive Tuesday in restricted movement, according to a base news release. Seven people with COVID-19 are being monitored there.

Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, south of Hiroshima, has had five people infected with COVID-19 since Monday, according to a news release Tuesday. Three had been in restricted movement and two were not.

CDC again urges people to avoid traveling to Guam

Stars and Stripes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has again raised Guam’s coronavirus risk level to “very high,” meaning people should avoid all travel to the U.S. territory.

The designation — the highest of the CDC’s four-tiered travel warning system — took effect Monday because the island has tallied over 500 new COVID-19 cases over the past 28 days.

Guam had been at “high,” or level three, for the past three weeks. It was last under the CDC’s “very high” designation between May 17 and June 7.

So far during the pandemic the island has confirmed 10,559 COVID-19 infections, 1,415 of which were active as of Tuesday, and 149 deaths, according

to Guam’s Joint Information Center. There were 206 cases announced on Tuesday evening.

Forty-five of Guam’s COVID-19 patients were hospitalized as of 6 p.m. Tuesday, according to the information center. Of those, at least 26 have not been vaccinated and three are on ventilators.

Starting Labor Day, Guam will begin imposing a proof-of-vaccination policy for myriad activities, from movie theaters to ocean cruises.

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero signed an executive order Aug. 21 requiring businesses and large gatherings to check for proof of vaccination from clients and participants ages 12 and older. Anyone without proof will be denied service, according to the order.

NAS Sigonella sets new virus restrictions amid surge in Sicily

Stars and Stripes

A rising COVID-19 caseload in Sicily triggered tougher mask and other restrictions this week for residents and U.S. military members.

Naval Air Station Sigonella personnel must now wear masks outside if at least 6 feet of social distancing cannot be maintained,

said NAS Sigonella spokesman Lt. Drake Greer.

For service members who don’t live together, group dining at restaurants and food courts is limited to four people. Families are not affected, he said.

The changes are in accordance with Italian law, Greer said.

Sicily reported 1,600 new cases

of COVID-19 on Monday.

That’s about 38% of the 4,257 cases reported nationwide the same day, according to a Tuesday report from the Italian Health Ministry.

The region has seen over 1,000 new cases daily since about mid-August, the peak of Italy’s summer vacation period, The Associ-

ated Press reported this week.

The combination of the caseload increases and the rise in the numbers of hospital and intensive care beds occupied by COVID-19 patients makes Sicily the only Italian region designated a yellow zone by the Health Ministry. The remaining 19 are designated as white zones.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Breakdown on subway sparked by power surge

NY NEW YORK — A momentary power surge disrupted half of the New York City subway system for several hours and stranded hundreds of passengers, Gov. Kathy Hochul said.

The unprecedented breakdown affected more than 80 trains on the subway system's numbered lines plus the L train, Hochul said.

She said the outage was "momentary" and a backup system was activated. "But when they tried to go back to normal, there was a surge — an unprecedented surge — that resulted in the subway losing signalization and communication ability," Hochul said. "The confluence of events that led to this has never happened before to our knowledge," she said.

Police arrest 2 students accused of school threat

FL PEMBROKE PINES — Two South Florida students are accused of making online threats to "terrorize" their high school, police said.

Police in Pembroke Pines said they received a tip about an online threat of a potential shooting at Charles W. Flanagan High School. Additional officers were deployed to the school, which is located in western Broward County.

Police said they arrested two students, ages 15 and 16, after discovering the threat on Instagram.

The teens face charges including a second-degree felony for making a written threat to do bodily harm or commit an act of

terrorism and a second-degree misdemeanor for knowingly causing the disruption of an educational institution.

New sinking in tilting high-rise halts repair

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A \$100 million fix to stop a San Francisco luxury high-rise from sinking and tilting even more is on hold while engineers try to learn why the building has sunk another inch during the repair.

Doug Elmets, spokesman for the Millennium Tower, said in a statement that pile installation to beef up the building's foundation is on hold for two to four weeks as they try to understand why the "increased settlement rate and available means of mitigating this."

Elmets said the building is safe, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

The building had sunk 16 inches into the soft soil and landfill of San Francisco's dense financial district. It was also leaning, creating a 2-inch tilt at the base and a 6-inch lean at the top.

Residents can have land designated 'wild yard'

WV CHARLESTON — West Virginia residents who landscape for wildlife use can have their land designated a "wild yard."

The program has 300 members around the state and is operated through the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources to create more natural habitat for wildlife around the state.

"It's such a wonderful program to get involved in," Rebecca Linger, who owns a certified

wild yard, said in a news release from the agency. "And you get the added benefit of creating an environment around your house where you can enjoy seeing wildlife coming and going. It really is delightful."

Jim Fregonara, a wildlife biologist with the division, said landowners who apply, provide a habitat plan and demonstrate that their property meets the needs of native wildlife will be added to a register of wild yards. They also receive a certificate for participating in the program and a sign post to display in the yard.

Fin whale that died had underlying conditions

DE LEWES — A necropsy has found that an endangered fin whale that died after it became beached along the Delaware coast had multiple underlying conditions.

The Marine Education Research and Rehabilitation Institute said its necropsy determined the whale had significant parasitic infections in the liver, lungs and kidneys, WDEL reported.

The institute also said the whale's thin body and empty stomach suggested it had been impaired and had not eaten recently.

Tunnel explorer gets washed into river, dies

MN ST. PAUL — A man who was exploring tunnels under a bridge in St. Paul died after he and two others were washed into the Mississippi River.

Five adults were exploring the tunnels when a thunderstorm

hit. Two people were able to escape, but the three others were washed into the river, according to the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office.

Ramsey County Water Patrol, St. Paul police, St. Paul and Minneapolis firefighters were called to the scene. The responders were able to rescue two of the three adults who washed into the river.

The body of the third person was recovered after officials searched most of the night.

Headstones of historic African Americans moved

VA KING GEORGE — Dozens of headstones from a historic African American cemetery in the nation's capital that were used as erosion control along the Virginia shoreline of the Potomac River are being relocated to a memorial garden in Maryland.

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan, Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam and Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser attended a ceremony in Caledon State Park in King George to mark the transfer of the first 55 headstones from Virginia to Maryland, officials said. The grave markers will be part of a memorial garden at National Harmony Memorial Park in Prince George's County honoring the 37,000 people buried at the original cemetery.

This fall, National Guard members from Maryland and Virginia will recover more headstones in the area where the first artifacts were found, officials said. Virginia approved \$4 million for recovery and restoration of the gravestones and the creation of a shoreline memorial, Northam's office said.

— From wire reports

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Top college teams reload with new QBs

Associated Press

Bryce Young was mostly a spectator for Alabama's march to the College Football Playoff last season. Ditto for Ohio State's C.J. Stroud.

DJ Uiagalelei was a superb fill-in when Clemson needed him most. Notre Dame's Jack Coan was at a different school altogether.

All four teams from last season's playoff sent their starting quarterbacks on to the NFL, ushering in successors trying to carry their teams into contention again. And they're all ranked in the preseason top 10, so it doesn't seem far-fetched heading into the foursome's first games as the full-time starter.

They don't get to settle into their new roles with cupcakes, either.

Defending national champion Alabama is the preseason No. 1 heading into Saturday's opener against No. 14 Miami in Atlanta. No. 3 Clemson faces fifth-ranked Georgia in Charlotte, N.C.

Stroud and No. 4 Ohio State

are visiting Minnesota on Thursday night. Coan and the ninth-ranked Fighting Irish play at Florida State on Sunday.

The Crimson Tide have turned to the much-ballyhooed Young, whose last few successes have set high bars on their way to the NFL. Not even Tua Tagovailoa arrived in Tuscaloosa with as much anticipation as Young, a 6-foot, 194-pounder who's built more like Tagovailoa and Kyler Murray than Trevor Lawrence.

Clemson's Uiagalelei, successor to No. 1 overall pick Lawrence, did nothing to diminish the buzz or expectations in his two starting chances last season.

Ohio State is also going with the youth movement in picking the redshirt freshman Stroud to replace Justin Fields. Notre Dame is turning to the more seasoned Coan, a graduate transfer from Wisconsin.

They all have big arms to fill. Fields and Alabama's Jones were also first-rounders while the New Orleans Saints picked Notre Dame's Ian Book in the

fourth round.

Young was the nation's top-rated dual threat quarterback coming out of high school and No. 2 overall, according to the 247Sports composite rankings. He was mostly relegated to mop-up duties as a freshman.

Alabama coach Nick Saban doesn't usually rave about his newly anointed quarterbacks until they've got some wins under their belts. Saban, however, does like how Young has handled the job even with a number of other new starters around him.

"Bryce has a really good knowledge of the offense," Saban said. "He's a really bright guy. He makes good choices and decisions. He has a really good feel in the pocket. And he's played really, really well."

Uiagalelei had the best chance among the new guys to flash his potential last season while Lawrence was sidelined with COVID-19. He directed the largest comeback in Memorial Stadium when he led the Tigers back from an 18-point deficit against Boston College

in his starting debut.

Then, his 439 yards against Notre Dame were the third-most in school history.

After that, it was back to waiting his turn behind Lawrence.

The most experienced of the foursome is Notre Dame's Coan. He started 18 games for Wisconsin in 2018 and 2019 before missing last season following foot surgery.

Coan won the competition to replace Book, whose 30 wins as starting quarterback is a Notre Dame record.

None of the contenders to replace Fields has thrown a pass in a college game.

The 6-foot-3, 218-pound Stroud from Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., is a pro-style quarterback with a strong arm and a quick, compact release.

He isn't quite as mobile as Fields, but Buckeyes coach Ryan Day said, "he's shown us all the things that we needed to see" leading up to the Minnesota game.

Winning the job is just Step 1. Now, the trick is to hold onto it.

Picking the playoff teams and the national champion

Associated Press

At this time last year, trying to make predictions about college football started with guessing whether the season would actually reach a conclusion.

Only 60% of FBS conferences kicked off in September — which explains picking UCF to make the College Football Playoff in 2020.

Does it explain picking Texas? There are only so many things one can blame on the pandemic. (It should be noted that the if-in-doubt-pick-Alabama strategy worked out great).

College football is trending back toward business as usual in 2021. Fingers crossed. That should make projecting who disappoints, overachieves, reaches the playoff and wins the national

championship much easier.

Right?

Going up/down

Three teams that will start the season unranked, but will finish ranked:

TCU (40 points in the preseason poll): Coach Gary Patterson seems due to have a surprise Big 12 contender with breakout candidates at running back (Zachary Evans) and receiver (Quentin Johnson). Beware five Big 12 road games.

Houston (five points): The American Athletic Conference is usually good for at least one surprising team per season (see: Tulsa in 2020, Navy in 2019). The Cougars look the part in Year 3 under Dana Holgorsen.

Kentucky (zero points): The Wildcats are a college football hipster pick to finish second in the SEC East, with a viral video quarterback in Penn State transfer Will Levis.

Three teams that will start the season ranked, but finish unranked:

No. 13 Florida: The Gators lost a lot of firepower and need a big step forward from a defense that was a mess last season. Oh, look, Alabama's on the schedule, too.

No. 17 Indiana: The Hoosiers' rise has been a great story under coach Tom Allen, but last season's milestone wins against Michigan and Penn State will be tough to repeat on the road.

No. 23 Louisiana-Lafayette: A small step back after consecutive

seasons of double-digit victories for coach Billy Napier's team is probably enough to relegate the Ragin' Cajuns to unranked. If they start a second consecutive season with a victory at a Big 12 opponent — this time vs. No. 21 Texas — this pick goes out the window.

College Football Playoff

Wait! A playoff without Alabama and Ohio State?

Orange Bowl semifinal — No. 1 Georgia vs. No. 4 Wisconsin

Cotton Bowl semifinal — No. 2 Clemson vs. No. 3 Oklahoma

National title game

Georgia vs. Oklahoma. The Bulldogs win that elusive first national championship since 1980.

No sports on Guam or football at Daegu

By DAVE ORNAUER
Stars and Stripes

There won't be football on Guam or at Daegu.

Guam High School's sports teams have nobody to play, following the announcement Friday by Guam's governor shutting down the island's public, private and charter schools due to a spike in coronavirus cases.

The Panthers can still scrimmage, practice and condition, which is more than can be said for other schools on Guam.

Meanwhile, Daegu in South Korea won't field its football team this fall, the school announced Monday. Fewer than 15 students that were needed to play a nine-man format signed up to play. DODEA Korea's season schedule has not been set yet, but the district's athletics directors said the fall season is to begin Sept. 10-11.

The Panthers were set to begin the Guam Interscholastic Sports Association season Saturday at home against George Washington.

DODEA Pacific leadership met by video conference Monday with Joint Region Marianas and the commands at both Naval Base Guam and Andersen Air Force Base, at which it was decided "schools will remain open on base," chief of staff Todd Schlitz told Stars and Stripes by phone Monday afternoon.

Guam's cross country, girls indoor and boys beach volleyball, golf and football teams may continue to condition, practice and scrimmage, Schlitz said.

"They won't have anybody to play, but at least they can do something," he said.

The news was met with disappointment by longtime Panthers football coach Jacob Dowdell. Football season on Guam was canceled altogether last year due to the pandemic.

"I'm really hurting for the kids," Dowdell said. "They worked so hard over the summer, they did everything that was asked of them and now they're being told no, they can't play football."

Besides Guam and George Washington, five other public schools, John F. Kennedy, Okkodo, Tiyan, Simon Sanchez

and Southern, and one private school, Father Duenas, compete in ISA football.

Guam's Pacific Daily News reported Friday that hospitalizations on the island have increased by 300% the last two weeks. Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero didn't specify how long the school shutdown would last, the PDN reported.

In Daegu, athletic director and football coach Blake Sims said the school had 10 sign up for football, "but we only had six or seven committed" at any one practice.

"We weren't even close to that," Sims said, adding that the school's small enrollment — 129 as of Aug. 30 — will limit Daegu to tennis, cross country, golf and boys and girls volleyball.

"It is what it is," Sims said. "We have 60% of our enrollment out for sports. It's hard to create kids that you don't have."

The decision leaves just two football programs in DODEA Korea: Osan and Humphreys. There was no immediate word whether Humphreys would compete as one team or split its football enrollment into two, as it did for volleyball and basketball last year.

Pats cut Newton, clearing way for Jones to start

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — The Mac Jones era in New England begins.

The Patriots released quarterback Cam Newton on Tuesday, clearing the way for the rookie to open the season as New England's quarterback, according to a person with knowledge of the move.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because the decision has not been announced.

Newton's release came hours before NFL teams reduce rosters to 53 players and brings an abrupt end to his stay in New England. Newton went 7-8 as the starter in his first season since Tom Brady headed to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. New England finished 7-9 for the year.

Newton started each of New England's three preseason games, but he also missed five days of practice leading into Sunday's exhibition finale against the New York Giants after a "misunderstanding" of NFL COVID-19 protocols. It required him to sit out a mandatory five-day waiting period for unvaccinated players after he attended an out-of-town doctor's appointment.

Meanwhile, Jones was impressive throughout training camp, displaying an ability to lead the offense down the field and bounce back from mistakes. He's also earned the respect of the coaching staff and incumbent veterans alike.

Fellow Alabama alum and linebacker Dont'a Hightower said last week that Jones' work ethic has stood out in the locker room. He also noted how he recently heard the rookie had been looking at the Patriots' defensive plays to help him conceptualize how opposing defenses might attack.

"I give him credit for that because not a lot of young guys would see that as an opportunity and he did that on his own," Hightower said. "You can take that for what it's worth. The kid works hard. I'll leave it at that."

Coach Bill Belichick acknowledged at the time that Newton's recent COVID-19 protocols absence provided an opportunity for Jones. The rookie seized it, performing well during the first of two joint practices with the Giants.

"I'm going to be ready whenever my time comes up," Jones said after Sunday's

22-20 win over New York. "We got work to do and we'll get the things fixed and then we'll just keep rolling."

Though he didn't start any exhibition games, Jones took 107 snaps to just 38 for Newton. He completed 69% of his passes (36 of 52) for 389 yards, a touchdown and no interceptions.

"I've learned at a young age to just prepare like the starter," Jones said Sunday. "You don't have to be the starter, but you have to prepare and get into your routine."

When he was drafted in April, Jones became the first quarterback selected in the first round during Belichick's time in New England.

This move by the Patriots means this could mark just the second time in the NFL since the merger that more than two rookie quarterbacks started opening games.

Trevor Lawrence already has been named the starter in Jacksonville; Zach Wilson is projected to start for the Jets; and Jones is set for New England's opener against Miami on Sept. 12.

Five rookie quarterbacks started openers in 2012.

After loss, Murray rips Tsitsipas' breaks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Andy Murray is aware that Stefanos Tsitsipas has a growing reputation for pushing the boundaries when it comes to taking breaks during a match. Murray expected that to be an issue during their first-round match at the U.S. Open — and, when it was, that didn't sit well. Not at all.

Murray figures there was enough for him to deal with in Monday's high heat and humidity: He's 34. He's got an artificial hip. He's ranked 112th after a series of health issues. At one point, he tumbled to the ground, losing his balance in sweat-soaked shoes and leaving splotches on the blue court from his soggy clothing.

So as the contest stretched to almost five hours, Murray did not appreciate that Tsitsipas took a medical timeout after the third set and made a lengthy visit to the locker

room after the fourth. Following an entertaining, back-and-forth 2-6, 7-6 (7), 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 loss to Tsitsipas, Murray complained about what he considered unfair gamesmanship by the French Open runner-up and announced: "I lost respect for him."

"It's nonsense. And he knows it, as well," said Murray, who is nearly a decade — and a pair of hip operations — removed from a U.S. Open championship.

Told of Murray's displeasure, the just-turned-23 Tsitsipas said: "If there's something that he has to tell me, we should speak, the two of us, to kind of understand what went wrong. I don't think I broke any rules."

The whole thing lent some intrigue to the proceedings as the year's last Grand Slam tournament got underway with fans in the stands at full capacity — the combined attendance for the day and night sessions was 53,783 — a year after all spectators were

banned because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"When we didn't have a crowd," said reigning champion Naomi Osaka said after beating Marie Bouzkova 6-4, 6-1 at night, "I know it felt quite lonely for me."

That was Osaka's first Grand Slam match since she pulled out of the French Open in late May for a mental health break.

With exits for Murray and 2014 champion Marin Cilic, who stopped playing because of an injury in the fifth set against Philipp Kohlschreiber, the only man left in the draw with even one Grand Slam title is No. 1 Novak Djokovic.

He was set to debut Tuesday night as he tries to break a tie for the men's mark of 20 majors with Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal and become the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to complete a calendar-year Grand Slam.

Rays beat Red Sox, stretch win streak to 8

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Wander Franco extended his on-base streak to 30 games with a two-run single, fellow rookie Luis Patiño pitched neatly into the sixth inning and the AL East-leading Tampa Bay Rays won their eighth in a row, beating the Boston Red Sox 6-1 Monday night.

Brandon Lowe hit his career-high 31st homer on the first pitch from Boston starter Nick Pivetta, sending the Rays on their way.

The Red Sox, who led the Rays by 1 1/2 games entering their three-game series at Tampa Bay on July 30, dropped to nine games back in the division race.

Angels 8, Yankees 7: Shohei Ohtani hit his major-league leading 42nd home run, Jack Mayfield connected for his first career grand slam and host Los Angeles dealt New York its third straight loss.

The difference in the game ended up being a two-out single by Juan Lagares off Clay Holmes in the eighth inning that drove in Brandon Marsh with the go-ahead run.

Blue Jays 7, Orioles 3: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit two homers and raised his season total to 38, Robbie Ray pitched seven innings for his first win in six starts, and host Toronto won its third straight with a victory over Baltimore.

Guerrero hit a solo home run off right-hander Chris Ellis in the fourth inning and a three-run blast off righty Marcos DiPlán in the seventh.

Brewers 3, Giants 1: Corbin Burnes struck out nine while tossing scoreless ball into the seventh and singled home a run to help his winning cause, pitching Milwaukee to a win at San Francisco. Burnes (9-4) didn't walk a batter and allowed four hits. Brandon Belt led off the seventh with a double and Kris Bryant singled to end Burnes' night.

Padres 7, Diamondbacks 5: Chris Paddack gave up one run over 4 2/3 innings in his return from the injured list, Fernando Tatis Jr. added a homer, double and three RBIs, and San Diego held on to win at Arizona.

Paddack allowed just three hits in his first outing since July

27. Craig Stammen (6-3) pitched a scoreless inning of relief and earned the win.

Astros 4, Mariners 3: Jake Meyers had the last of three singles as part of Houston's eighth-inning rally against former teammate Joe Smith (2-3), scoring Kyle Tucker with the go-ahead run in a win at Seattle.

Phil Maton (4-0) walked one and struck out two in one inning of work. Ryan Pressly worked around a leadoff walk in the ninth for his 22nd save.

Phillies 7, Nationals 4: Bryce Harper homered in the first inning and Philadelphia won its fourth straight with a victory at Washington.

Brad Miller also went deep and Ronald Torreyes added a bases-loaded triple for the Phillies, who improved to 7-1 at Nationals Park this season.

Cardinals 3, Reds 1: Jon Lester allowed one hit while pitching into the seventh inning, Paul Goldschmidt homered and visiting St. Louis inched closer to slumping Cincinnati in the NL wild-card race.

The Cardinals closed within 2 1/2 games of the Reds for the

second wild-card spot.

Twins 3, Tigers 2: Bailey Ober pitched six solid innings and Josh Donaldson's two-run homer helped Minnesota win at Detroit.

The Twins have won three of four.

Derek Hill hit a solo homer for the Tigers.

Rangers 4, Rockies 3: A.J. Alexy pitched one-hit ball through five shutout innings and won his major league debut, DJ Peters, Leody Taveras and Nick Solak homered in consecutive innings and host Texas beat Colorado.

Alexy (1-0) allowed only a second-inning double to C.J. Cron. The 23-year-old struck out four and walked three while throwing 81 pitches.

Dodgers 5, Braves 3: Julio Urias earned his major league-leading 15th victory and Los Angeles stopped Atlanta's franchise-record 13-game road winning streak.

Mookie Betts homered on his bobblehead night after catching a ceremonial first pitch from his mom. He blew a kiss to her as he crossed the plate.