

NATO defense chiefs hold Ukraine talk

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO defense chiefs held a “candid discussion” Wednesday about what security guarantees they could offer Kyiv to help forge a peace agreement that ends Russia’s three-year war on Ukraine, a senior alliance official said.

Italian Adm. Giuseppe Cavo Dragone, the chair of NATO’s Military Committee, said that 32 defense chiefs from across the alliance held a video conference amid a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end the fighting.

He said there was a “great, candid discussion” in the call. “I thanked everyone for their always proactive participation in these meetings: we are united, and that unity was truly tangible today, as always,” he wrote on social platform X without providing further details.

Assurances that it won’t be invaded again in the future are one of the keys for getting Ukraine to sign up for a peace deal with Russia. It wants Western help for its military, including weapons and training, to shore up its defenses,

and Western officials are scrambling to figure out what commitments they might offer.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chided efforts to work on security arrangements in Ukraine without Moscow’s involvement.

“We cannot agree with the fact that it is now proposed to resolve collective security issues without the Russian Federation. This will not work,” Lavrov said Wednesday, according to state news agency RIA Novosti.

Russia will “ensure legitimate interests firmly and harshly,” Lavrov added at a news conference in Moscow with Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman al-Safadi.

U.S. Air Force Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, NATO’s supreme allied commander Europe, took part in the virtual talks, Dragone said. U.S. Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was also due to participate, a U.S. defense official said.

Caine also met with European military chiefs Tuesday evening

in Washington to assess the best military options for political leaders, according to the defense official, who wasn’t authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

U.S. President Donald Trump met last Friday with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska and on Monday hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and prominent European leaders at the White House. Neither meeting delivered concrete progress.

Trump is trying to steer Putin and Zelenskyy toward a settlement more than three years after Russia invaded its neighbor, but there are major obstacles. They include Ukraine’s demands for Western-backed military assurances to ensure Russia won’t mount another invasion in the coming years.

“We need strong security guarantees to ensure a truly secure and lasting peace,” Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post Wednesday after Russian missile and drone strikes hit six regions of Ukraine overnight.

Kyiv’s European allies are looking to set up a force that could backstop any peace agreement, and a coalition of 30 countries, including European nations, Japan and Australia, has signed up to support the initiative.

Military chiefs are figuring out how that security force might work. The role that the U.S. might play is unclear. Trump on Tuesday ruled out sending U.S. troops to help defend Ukraine against Russia. Russia has repeatedly said that it would not accept NATO troops in Ukraine.

Trump said Monday he has begun arrangements for a face-to-face meeting between Putin and Zelenskyy, although the Kremlin hasn’t publicly confirmed such a possibility and no venue was suggested.

Lavrov, in his Moscow press conference, said Russia is prepared to continue negotiations with Ukraine in any format.

Ukraine and Western leaders have accused Putin of dragging out peace negotiations in the hope of capturing more land before any settlement.

Three US destroyers head to waters near Venezuela

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is deploying three Aegis guided-missile destroyers to the waters off Venezuela as part of President Donald Trump’s effort to combat threats from Latin American drug cartels, according to a U.S. official briefed on the planning.

The USS Gravely, the USS Jason Dunham and the USS Sampson are expected to arrive soon, said the official, who was not authorized to comment and spoke Tuesday on the condition

of anonymity.

A Defense Department official confirmed that the military assets have been assigned to the region in support of counter-narcotics efforts. The official, who was not authorized to comment about military planning, said the vessels would be deployed “over the course of several months.”

The deployment of U.S. destroyers and personnel comes as Trump has pushed for using the U.S. military to thwart cartels he blames for the flow of

fentanyl and other illicit drugs into American communities and for perpetuating violence in some U.S. cities.

Trump has also pressed Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum to cooperate more on security than her predecessor, specifically being more aggressive in pursuit of Mexico’s cartels. But she has drawn a clear line when it comes to Mexico’s sovereignty, rejecting suggestions by Trump and others of intervention by the U.S. military.

Trump in February designated Venezuela’s Tren de Aragua, MS-13 in El Salvador and six groups based in Mexico as foreign terrorist organizations. His Republican administration has also stepped up immigration enforcement against alleged gang members.

The designation is normally reserved for groups like al-Qaida or Islamic State that use violence for political ends — not for money-focused crime rings such as the Latin American cartels.

Pentagon unveils ship that has no crew

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

SEATTLE — A previously unseen vessel cruising Puget Sound has been the talk of ship spotters, nautical bloggers, local television and newspapers as far away as the East Coast.

“Images of the odd-looking, 180-foot ship escorted by a tugboat through the Saratoga Passage in Puget Sound emerged on Reddit earlier this week,” the New York Post reported in March.

The vessel had few markings, a blank, white-covered superstructure and no visible crew.

“A mysterious warship with no one aboard was recently seen in waters off of Washington state,” wrote the WION news site.

The Pentagon confirmed soon after that the vessel was a project of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

On Aug. 11, the Navy went public with details on the ship, including photographs of a bottle of champagne being smashed across its bow as part of a naming ceremony at a Puget Sound shipyard in Everett, Wash., north of Seattle.

“DARPA has marked a traditional naval milestone with the christening of USX-1 Defiant, a first-of-its-kind autonomous, unmanned surface vessel designed from the ground up to never accommodate a human aboard,” the agency reported.

The 240-metric ton vessel, built by Nichols Brothers Boat Builders and Serco Maritime at a small shipyard on Whidbey Island in Puget Sound, is a demonstration model for the Pentagon’s No Manning Required Ship, or NOMARS, program. It’s designed to operate autonomously in open seas for up to a year without needing human maintenance.

The Navy could use unmanned vessels such as the Defiant on missions that might risk casualties on crewed ships, DARPA said.

At an U.S. Naval Institute conference Friday in Annapolis, Md., on the future of unmanned vessels, top Navy officials said the Defiant and other uncrewed ships are a key to match the number of Chinese ships and their capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Defiant was built with a \$25 million project development budget.

Congress just approved more than \$2 billion for Navy uncrewed ship programs overall, primarily in the reconciliation bill that supplemented defense spending in addition to spending planned in the National Defense Authorization Act, annual legislation that sets expenditures and policies for the Defense Department.

The ship has no portals and doors, corridors, gangplanks, ventilation, bridge or other open spaces that would be needed for a crewed ship.

The simplified hull design also will allow for rapid production if the Pentagon approves the project following ongoing sea trials. The project is under DARPA and would shift to the Navy later if tests go as planned. At that point, the Defiant would be officially commissioned as a Navy ship. Defiant would operate under the Navy’s Unmanned Maritime Systems Program Office, according to DARPA.

The Defiant is not armed, but the Pentagon has released concept plans that would include missile systems.

Weapons control would be handled by humans from remote locations or nearby crewed vessels, according to the Pentagon.

9 Marines detained as Okinawa patrols step up enforcement

BY BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Nine Marines may face charges under the military justice system after encountering a joint patrol in Okinawa city, the latest sign that the military is cracking down on off-duty misconduct.

About 50 U.S. and Japanese civil and military authorities took part in the patrol near Gate 2 Street, a nightlife district outside Kadena Air Base, from midnight to 2 a.m. Saturday, a spokesman for Okinawa city’s Base Policy Division said by phone Monday.

Military police took the Marines into custody during the patrol and released them later that morning to their commands, which will determine possible

charges, Marine Corps Installations Pacific spokeswoman 1st Lt. Kelsey Enlow said by phone Wednesday.

The detentions represent a step up in enforcing liberty rules imposed after a spate of sexual assault cases surfaced on the island, the installations commander said this week.

“As you do everything through operations, you slowly ramp up in the context of those operations, and over the last several months it’s been kind of an education process,” Maj. Gen. Brian Wolford told reporters Monday during a roundtable at Camp Foster. “Now over the last weekend we have transitioned to enforcement of those regulations.”

The patrol included 20 law enforcement officers from base

Provost Marshal’s Offices, 12 of them Marines, who continued until about 5 a.m., Enlow said. Local and prefectural police and representatives of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, an arm of Japan’s Ministry of Defense, made up the rest.

Three Marines were fingerprinted and entered into the provost marshal database for “alleged violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice,” Enlow said by phone Wednesday, without elaborating.

The other six “either refused to provide a valid ID, became aggressive, or tried to flee the area,” she wrote in an email Monday.

One Marine who was shouting and acting aggressively was held down by police and later taken to Naval Hospital Okina-

wa, the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper reported Tuesday, citing unnamed officials.

All nine Marines were held at the Provost Marshal’s Office on Foster before being released to unit representatives later Saturday morning, Enlow said.

Joint patrols began April 18 in response to a series of sexual assault allegations against U.S. service members over the past couple of years.

Senior Airman Brennon Washington was convicted last year of kidnapping and sexually assaulting a minor in December 2023. Marine Lance Cpl. Jamel Clayton was convicted in June of strangling and attempting to sexually assault a woman in May 2024. Both cases are under appeal. Two other cases are still pending.

USS New Orleans catches fire off Okinawa's coast

BY BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

Japan's coast guard and military are helping the Navy battle a blaze that broke out aboard an amphibious transport docking ship off Okinawa's southeastern coast on Wednesday evening.

"Crews are responding to a fire aboard USS New Orleans (LPD 18) this evening, Aug. 20, (Japan time) which is in the vicinity of Okinawa, Japan," U.S. 7th Fleet said. "We will provide more details as they become available."

Task Force 76 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. John Mike acknowledged additional inquiries but did not immediately provide responses.

Camp Foster sent a message to the Japan coast guard at 5 p.m. stating there was a fire aboard the San Antonio-class vessel near White Beach Naval Facility, according to a coast guard news release.

"The crew is currently engaged in firefighting efforts, but we have requested the Japan Coast Guard to assist with the firefighting," the message

said, according to the release.

No injuries or oil spills were reported, according to a second coast guard release.

The fire started in the front part of the 684-foot-long vessel, a coast guard spokesman said.

"We do not know if it started on the outside or the inside of the ship; we are still investigating," he said.

Two tugboats and an unspecified Self-Defense Force vessel were participating in firefighting efforts at 6 p.m., the spokesman said.

Camp Foster withdrew the firefighting request at 5:55 p.m. and asked all vessels to stay about a mile away, the coast guard said. The request was reinstated at 7:28 p.m.

The coast guard initially dispatched one vessel and was preparing to join firefighting efforts as of 8:30 p.m., the spokesman said.

Some Japanese government officials may speak to the press only on condition of anonymity.

Hurricane forces return of Iwo Jima group to Va.

BY ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group returned stateside earlier this week as a hurricane in the western Atlantic Ocean threatened high winds and large swells along the U.S. Eastern Seaboard.

The amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima was photographed by a ship spotter on Tuesday as the vessel returned to Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia. The group includes the amphibious transport dock ships USS Fort Lauderdale and USS San Antonio, which also arrived in Norfolk, USNI News reported Tuesday, citing an unnamed Navy official.

The 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit also is part of the group, which comprises more than 4,500 Marines and sailors, according to the Navy.

The ships returned to "stay safe" from the hurricane, the official told USNI.

Over the weekend, Erin intensified to a major hurricane but later weakened, downgrading to a Category 2 storm early Wednesday, with maximum sustained winds of about 100 mph, the National Hurricane Center in Miami said.

The hurricane was not expected to make landfall, but the center warned against swimming at most U.S. East Coast beaches due to the potential for "life-threatening surf

and rip currents."

The ARG's return came just five days after it departed Norfolk on what the Navy said was a regularly scheduled deployment. It was the first deployment for a U.S. amphibious ready group in eight months, according to USNI.

The group had traveled to waters off the North Carolina coast to onload the Marine expeditionary unit. It wasn't clear whether that embark was completed, USNI reported.

The Navy didn't say in a statement Friday where the group was headed. But Reuters and CNN, citing unidentified U.S. officials, reported that it was deployed to waters around Latin America and the Caribbean to fight drug cartels.

Additionally, the destroyers USS Gravelly, USS Jason Dunham and USS Sampson were being deployed near Venezuela over the coming months as part of President Donald Trump's counternarcotics strategy, The Associated Press reported Tuesday, citing an unidentified U.S. official.

Also on Tuesday, the Navy said a U.S. Coast Guard detachment embarked on USS Sampson had interdicted a suspected drug smuggling vessel Aug. 11 in international waters, seizing nearly 1,300 pounds of cocaine.

The Navy said the ship was operating in a known drug trafficking corridor but did not specify where the interdiction occurred.

Trump wants to paint border wall black so it will be too hot to touch

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump has ordered the entire southern border wall to be painted black to stop migrants from crossing because it will be too hot to touch, according to Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

Speaking near the border in New Mexico on Tuesday, Noem said crews have begun painting sections of the 30-foot steel bollards that make up the barriers. She said the directive came directly from Trump, under the expectation the dark paint will extend the steel's lifespan by slowing rust and discourage migrants from climbing the wall by making it unbearably hot under the desert sun.

"We are going to be painting the entire bor-

der wall black," Noem told reporters. Asked about criticism that the practice could make conditions harsher for migrants, she responded: "Don't touch it. People have a choice."

Noem didn't say how much the project will cost or how long it will take. She applied paint herself to a small section of a fence during the media appearance in Santa Teresa, N.M.

Noem's visit came as arrests at the southwest border have plunged to levels not seen in decades as the administration enacts stricter enforcement measures.

Still, the administration has pressed ahead with wall construction, filling in gaps in Santa Teresa, where about seven miles of new barriers are being installed.

Texas GOP to vote on redistricting maps

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The Republican-controlled Texas House of Representatives on Wednesday kicked off a heated debate over a new congressional map creating five new potential GOP seats that is expected to pass the chamber later in the day as part of a growing national redistricting battle.

The plan is the result of prodding by President Donald Trump, eager to stave off a mid-term defeat that would deprive his party of control of the House of Representatives. Texas Democratic lawmakers delayed a vote for 15 days by leaving the state in protest, depriving the House of enough members to do business.

State Rep. Todd Hunter, who wrote the legislation formally creating the new map, noted

that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed politicians to redraw districts for nakedly partisan purposes. “The underlying goal of this plan is straight forward: improve Republican political performance,” Hunter, a Republican, said as debate began.

Democrats responded that that was counter to the country’s values. “In a democracy, people choose their representatives,” said State Rep. Chris Turner, a Democrat. “This bill flips that on its head and lets politicians in Washington DC choose their voters.”

The Texas State Senate, also controlled by Republicans, needs to also pass the map and GOP Gov. Greg Abbott must sign them before they become official.

The House debate was expected to be the lengthiest and

greatest obstacle to the Republican push, but both parties expected the legislation to ultimately pass given the GOP’s significant majority in the chamber.

Democrats said they’re preparing to challenge the new map in court.

Some House Democrats returned from their flight on Monday, only to be assigned round-the-clock police escorts to ensure their attendance at Wednesday’s session. Seven who refused were confined to the House floor, where they protested on a livestream Tuesday night, led by Rep. Nicole Collier, who represents a minority-majority district in Fort Worth. Her staff removed a pillow, blanket and bag of personal effects early Wednesday.

As lawmakers trickled into

the chamber, several Democrats gave Collier a hug, said “Thank you,” and took photos with her. In a social media post Tuesday night, Collier put a call from 2024 Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris on her cellphone’s speaker. Harris told Collier that, “We are all in that room with you.”

House Speaker Dustin Burrows announced as debate started that doors to the chamber were locked and any member leaving was required to have a permission slip before exiting.

Furious national Democrats have vowed payback for the Texas map, with California’s Legislature poised to approve new maps adding more Democratic-friendly seats later this week. The map would still need to be approved by that state’s voters in November.

Tulsi Gabbard revokes 37 security clearances

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration said Tuesday that it was revoking the security clearances of 37 current and former national security officials in the latest act of retribution targeting public servants from the federal government’s intelligence community.

A memo from Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard accuses the singled-out individuals of having engaged in the “politicization or weaponization of intelligence” to advance personal or partisan goals, failing to safeguard classified information, failing to “adhere to professional analytic tradecraft standards” and other unspecified “detrimental” conduct.

The memo did not offer evidence to back up the accusations.

Many of the officials who were targeted left the govern-

ment years ago after serving in both senior national security positions and lower-profile roles far from the public eye. Some worked on matters that have long infuriated Trump, like the intelligence community assessment that Russia interfered in the 2016 presidential election on his behalf. And several signaled their concerns about Trump by signing a critical letter in 2019 that was highlighted on social media last month by right-wing provocateur and close Trump ally Laura Loomer.

The action is part of a broader Trump administration campaign to wield the levers of government against perceived adversaries, and reflects the president’s continued distrust of career intelligence officials he has long seen as working against his interests. The revocation of clearances has emerged as a go-to tactic for the administration.

Neb. plans migrant detention center, ‘Cornhusker Clink’

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska announced plans Tuesday for an immigration detention center in the remote southwest corner of the state as President Donald Trump’s administration races to expand the infrastructure necessary for increasing deportations.

The facility will be dubbed the “Cornhusker Clink,” a play on Nebraska’s nickname of the Cornhusker State and an old slang term for jail. The alliterative name follows in the vein of the previously announced “Alligator Alcatraz” and “Deportation Depot” detention centers in Florida and the “Speedway Slammer” in Indiana.

Republican Gov. Jim Pillen said he and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem had agreed to use an existing minimum security prison work camp in McCook — a remote city of about 7,000 people in the middle of the wide-

open prairies between Denver and Omaha — to house people awaiting deportation and being held for other immigration proceedings. It’s expected to be a Midwest hub for detainees from several states.

“This is about keeping Nebraskans — and Americans across our country — safe,” Pillen said in a statement.

The facility can accommodate 200 people with plans to expand to 300. McCook is about 210 miles west of Lincoln, the state capital.

“If you are in America illegally, you could find yourself in Nebraska’s Cornhusker Clink. Avoid arrest and self deport now using the CBP Home App,” Noem said in a separate statement.

Noem’s agency posted a picture on social media showing ears of corn wearing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement hats, standing in front of a prison fence.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ship blast causes fire near bridge collapse site

MD BALTIMORE — An explosion aboard a cargo vessel near the site of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge late Monday is under investigation, Baltimore and federal officials said.

Part of a Liberian cargo vessel exploded, causing a fire in a portion of the ship located south of Fort Carroll, according to Baltimore City Fire Department.

At 6:30 p.m., Baltimore City Fire Department firefighters responded to reports of a commercial vessel exploding in the Patapsco River.

The ship, a 751-foot commercial cargo vessel named W-Sapphire, showed signs of a fire consistent with an explosion, according to Baltimore City Fire Department spokesperson John Marsh.

"Firefighters responded by both land and water, including the department's fireboats," Marsh said. "The vessel remained afloat and was being assisted by tugboats."

All 23 of the crew members were accounted for and uninjured after the incident, according to fire officials. The U.S. Coast Guard also assisted in the rescue of the crew and the recovery of the ship.

State updates voter data, seeks more ID numbers

NC RALEIGH — Voter registration records for more than 20,000 people in North Carolina have been successfully amended thus far in an effort by election officials to add missing identification numbers.

In mid-July, the State Board of Elections began formally an effort that seeks to resolve a lawsuit filed by President Donald Trump's Justice Department that focused on voter registration records that lacked either a voter's driver's license number or the last four digits of their Social Security number. Federal and state laws have directed that election officials must request this ID information since 2004 of new registrants, but for about a decade the state's registration form failed to make clear that voters were supposed to provide it if they had it.

A "Registration Repair Project" created a public online database with the names of 103,270 registrants the lacking the numerical identifiers. They were asked to provide an ID number through the Division of Motor Vehicles website or by visiting their county election board offices.

As of Monday, the registrants on the list had fallen 20% to 82,540, an election board news release said.

Fake Labubu dolls pose choking hazard, US warns

MD BETHESDA — The counterfeit dupes of the popular plush Labubu dolls are sometimes called "Lafufus" — but the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has another name for them: choking hazards.

The commission issued a warning on Monday for consumers to avoid the counterfeit dolls because they pose "a serious risk of choking and death to young children." The knockoffs "break apart easily, releasing

small pieces that can become choking hazards," the commission said, urging consumers to stop buying and using Lafufus "immediately."

Fakes of the "ugly-cute" toys have flooded the market after the grinning, bunny-eared bag charms became the latest fashion must-have.

Authentic Pop Mart Labubu dolls feature a holographic Pop Mart sticker and a scannable QR code linking to the official Pop Mart site, and newer editions also have a subtle UV stamp on one foot, the commission said. Meanwhile, fake Lafufus will "often have overly bright colors or the wrong number of teeth," the commission said — authentic Labubus have nine teeth.

Man who sent weapons to N. Korea gets 8 years

CA LOS ANGELES — A California man has been sentenced to eight years in prison after admitting to shipping weapons and ammunition to North Korea that he said were to be used for a surprise attack on South Korea, authorities said Tuesday.

Shenghua Wen, 42, came to the U.S. from China on a student visa in 2012 and remained in the country illegally after it expired, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney's office in Los Angeles.

Wen pleaded guilty in June to one count of conspiracy to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and one count of acting as an illegal agent of a foreign government, the statement says. He was sentenced on Monday.

United Nations resolutions ban North Korea from import-

ing or exporting weapons.

In 2022, North Korean officials contacted him via an online messaging app and instructed him to buy firearms, prosecutors said. He shipped two containers of weapons and other items from Long Beach, Calif., to North Korea via Hong Kong in 2023. He told U.S. authorities that he was wired about \$2 million to do so, according to the complaint.

Capital plans to remove dam, restore floodplain

VT MONTPELIER — In Montpelier, city officials plan to remove the Pioneer Street Dam and restore a nearby floodplain. Together, the projects are predicted to have compounding positive effects that reduce flood risk in the city.

The Pioneer Street Dam — an old mill dam — is about 1.3 miles upstream from the capital city's downtown along the Winooski River. Not only is the dam filled with cracks, but engineers consider it a flood hazard.

"It's got about everything wrong with a dam you can imagine," said Roy Schiff, an engineer who's monitoring the dam.

Nearby sits an 18-acre parcel of land at 5 Home Farm Way, where the Stevens Branch of the Winooski River joins the main branch. That land, which houses the Jacob Davis Farmstead, was historically a floodplain. Restoring it to such, coupled with the dam removal just downstream, could significantly reduce flood risk, Schiff said.

The project offers a look at how recovery efforts from the 2023 flood are underway in the city.

— From wire reports

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Jones named Colts starting QB over Richardson

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Daniel Jones chose the Indianapolis Colts because he wanted a chance to prove he could still be a starting NFL quarterback.

The gamble paid off Tuesday when coach Shane Steichen announced Jones would start the Sept. 7 season opener against Miami, beating out Anthony Richardson, who just two years ago was dubbed the franchise's quarterback of the future.

The reason: consistency and accuracy.

"The operation at the line, discernment, checks, the protection, the ball placement, I think all of that played a factor in it," Steichen said. "I think Daniel did a great job doing that."

Steichen hinted a decision was coming soon following Saturday's 23-19 loss to Green Bay in the Colts' only home preseason game.

On Monday, he met with team co-owner Carlie Irsay-Gordon and general manager Chris Bal-

lard before informing the two quarterbacks and the rest of the team Tuesday before he went public.

Ballard and Steichen also know this is a critical season for their futures with the franchise, which has missed the playoffs four straight seasons, and they're not about to put Jones on a short leash.

"He's our starter for the season," Steichen said.

For Jones, the decision caps a harrowing nine-month journey in which he lost the starting job with the New York Giants, then sought and was granted his release. Minnesota signed him five days later, but Jones never took a snap for a team that lost to the Los Angeles Rams in the wild-card round.

Instead of re-signing him, the Vikings allowed Jones to test free agency. He wound up signing a one-year, \$14 million contract with Indianapolis because of the opportunity to compete with Richardson, the No. 4 overall pick

in the 2023 draft, for the starting job.

"That was obviously a big piece of why I came here — to play and be on the field, to be with this group," Jones said. "It's a strong group of players and a strong group of coaches and I think there's a lot to be excited about."

Jones has thrown for 14,582 yards with 70 TDs and 47 interceptions since being New York's selection at No. 6 overall in 2019. He finished last season with 2,070 yards, eight TDs and seven interceptions in 10 games with the Giants.

For Richardson, it's another setback in a short career that has been defined by injuries, missed games and blown opportunities.

The Colts took Richardson to end the revolving door at quarterback. Indy had a different opening-day starter every year from 2017-23. He ended that streak last year.

But Richardson made only four starts as a rookie before

needing season-ending shoulder surgery. Last year, injuries cost him four more starts and he was benched for two games after pulling himself out of a game because he said he needed a breather.

While Richardson has provided glimpses of the strong arm and impressive runs that impressed Colts scouts when he was playing for the Florida Gators, he's only 8-7 as an NFL starter — and has been unable to finish some of those games because of injuries.

In 2024, Richardson completed 47.7% of his throws, the lowest percentage of any regular starter in the league, and had 12 interceptions and eight touchdown passes. That's why Indianapolis wanted the competition.

Richardson worked on his footwork in hopes of improving his accuracy during the offseason, and while many of his teammates thought this was the best he'd looked in his three training camps, it wasn't good enough.

Rodgers, other starters to sit out Steelers' preseason finale

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Aaron Rodgers' first official snaps with Pittsburgh will have to wait until Week 1.

Coach Mike Tomlin said Tuesday that the four-time MVP, along with All-Pro defensive tackle Cam Heyward, star outside linebacker T.J. Watt and wide receiver DK Metcalf, will not play against the Panthers in the Steelers' preseason finale on Thursday.

Everyone else on the roster that's healthy, including defensive backs Jalen Ramsey and Darius Slay, running back Jaylen Warren and tight end Pat Freiermuth, could see the field in Carolina.

All were part of a sizeable group that watched Pittsburgh's first two exhibitions from the sideline. Yet with more than two weeks to prepare for the opener on the road against the New York Jets, Tomlin sees an opportunity for the majority of his team to knock off some rust before the games start counting.

The 41-year-old Rodgers has said throughout training camp that he'd be more than willing to take the field. Tomlin said

he's seen enough progress over the last month that there's no need to put Rodgers in harm's way.

"I'm comfortable with what I'm seeing out here, obviously," Tomlin said. "If I weren't, I'd be playing him."

Asked Tuesday what he wants to see coming out of the Panthers game, Rodgers repeated the word "health" multiple times.

The decision not to have Rodgers take the field for at least a series during the preseason is an unusual step for Tomlin, who is entering his 19th season with the Steelers.

Longtime Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger always saw some level of game action in August, and each of the Week 1 starters since Roethlisberger's January 2022 retirement — Mitch Trubisky, Kenny Pickett and Justin Fields — all made at least a token appearance, if not more, in the preseason.

Like that trio, Rodgers is in his first year with the Steelers. Unlike that trio, Rodgers is the league's oldest active player and still less than 24 months removed from an Achilles tendon injury that cut short his ini-

tial season with the Jets in 2023 after just four snaps.

There's a chance Pittsburgh's new-look secondary could play together for the first time against Carolina. The Steelers added cornerbacks Ramsey and Slay — who have a combined 13 Pro Bowl appearances and two Super Bowl rings between them — in the offseason to join a group that includes Joey Porter Jr. and DeShaun Elliott.

The group has been dominant at times during training camp but save for a joint scrimmage with Tampa Bay last week has yet to see the field together against an opposing team.

That could change Thursday, though Tomlin indicated plans may change if the Panthers decide to sit quarterback Bryce Young and running back Chuba Hubbard, among others.

"There's a collective component, a communication component, a coordination component to what they do, and if they get the opportunity to get some snaps against some capable people in the stadium, we'd appreciate it," Tomlin said.

Cubs sweep Brewers in doubleheader

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Jameson Taillon pitched six effective innings in his return from a calf injury, and the Chicago Cubs beat the Milwaukee Brewers 4-1 on Tuesday night for a sweep of their doubleheader.

Michael Busch drove in two runs as Chicago improved to 4-2 on an eight-game homestand. Ian Happ had two hits, and Owen Caissie contributed a bloop RBI single.

Coupled with their 6-4 win in the first game, the Cubs moved within seven games of NL Central-leading Milwaukee.

Taillon (8-6) allowed five hits in his first big league start since June 29.

In the opener, Chicago built a 5-0 lead on Caissie's two-run single in the first and Willi Castro's three-run shot off Chad Patrick (3-8) in the third.

But the Brewers quickly started chipping away at the deficit. Christian Yelich opened the fourth with his 26th homer, and Sal Frelick singled home Brandon Lockridge in the fifth. Frelick added another RBI single in a two-run sixth.

Caissie then gave the Cubs a boost with his first major league homer, a 381-foot drive to left-center off Shelby Miller that made it 6-4 in the sixth.

Four Chicago relievers combined for 3⅓ innings of two-hit ball after Matthew Boyd (12-6) departed in the sixth.

Blue Jays 7, Pirates 3: Max Scherzer pitched six strong innings to notch his 220th career win, and George Springer hit an early two-run home run as visiting Toronto defeated Pittsburgh on Tuesday night.

The Blue Jays (74-53) built a 5-0 lead against Mitch Keller in the first two innings.

Springer homered a 423-foot shot to center field in the second inning. Toronto scored three runs in the first when Alejandro Kirk had an RBI single and Nathan Lukes followed with a two-run single.

Kirk added a two-run home run, his 10th, off Colin Holderman in the seventh inning to make 7-1.

Phillies 6, Mariners 4: J.T. Realmuto hit a go-ahead two-run home run in the eighth inning, Kyle Schwarber and Bryson Stott also homered and host Philadelphia defeated Seattle.

Realmuto reached base three times and had three RBIs. He also had an RBI single and reached on a catcher's interference call on Mariners backstop Mitch Garver.

Schwarber opened the scoring in the first inning with his 44th homer, tied with Shohei Ohtani for the NL lead.

David Robertson (1-0) picked up the win in relief in his first appearance at Citizens Bank Park as a member of the Phillies since 2022.

Tigers 1, Astros 0, (10): Gleyber Torres drew a 10th-inning walk to send home Wenceel Pérez and give host Detroit a win over Houston, the Astros' third consecutive shutout loss.

Pérez started the 10th as the automatic runner on second base and took third on Andy Ibáñez's fly to deep right. Kaleb Ort (2-2) intentionally walked Dillon Dingler, then struck out Javier Báez for the second out.

Jahmai Jones walked, loading the bases, and Torres took a 3-2 sweeper low and outside.

Cardinals 7, Marlins 4: Tyler Saggese went 3-for-4 and scored two runs, Iván Herrera had three RBIs and visiting St. Louis beat Miami.

Herrera's RBIs accounted for the first three runs of the game and Pedro Pagés extended his season-high hitting streak to nine games with an RBI single in the fourth to make it 4-0 Cardinals.

The Marlins had their first hit of the game in the fourth inning on an infield single by Xavier Edwards. He scored on Jakob Marsee's triple and Marsee scored on a fielding error by St. Louis starting pitcher Michael McGreevy, who overthrew to third base to make it 4-2.

Royals 5, Rangers 2: Vinnie Pasquantino homered in the first inning and then scored the go-ahead run in the seventh when Jonathan India was hit by a pitch with the bases loaded, helping host Kansas City to a win over Texas.

Bobby Witt Jr. added a two-run shot in the eighth, and Mike Yastrzemski went deep for the Royals, who have won five straight and improved to 7-1.

Kansas City starter Seth Lugo and Rangers counterpart Merrill Kelly had matched each other pitch-for-pitch for most of the night, each giving up two runs over 6⅓ and six innings, respectively.

Yankees 13, Rays 3: Giancarlo Stanton and Cody Bellinger both hit two home runs, Aaron Judge launched his 40th of the season and visiting New York matched a franchise record with nine longballs in a win over Tampa Bay.

Judge, Bellinger and Stanton went back-to-back-to-back in the first inning to give the Yankees a 3-0 lead four batters into the game.

Dodgers 11, Rockies 4: Shohei Ohtani hit his 44th home run and Alex Call matched a career high with four hits as visiting Los Angeles beat Colorado.

Call and Ohtani each launched a solo homer in the second inning to help the Dodgers open a 7-0 lead against winless Austin Gomber in the third.

Mets 8, Nationals 1: David Peterson dominated Washington again, Mark Vientos homered for the second consecutive game and visiting New York pounded the Nationals for its third straight victory.

Peterson finally allowed a run when Dylan Crews led off the eighth with a triple and scored on a double-play grounder.

Orioles 4, Red Sox 3 (11): Samuel Basallo drove in the go-ahead run on a groundout in the 11th inning and visiting Baltimore held on to beat Boston after blow-

ing a two-run lead in the ninth.

The Orioles won their third straight and for the sixth time in their last seven games, sweeping the two-game series at Fenway Park but needing extra innings after Nathaniel Lowe hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth to tie it.

Braves 11, White Sox 10: Drake Baldwin hit a two-run single with two outs in the eighth inning and host Atlanta rallied from a six-run deficit to defeat Chicago.

Michael Harris II and Jurickson Profar each hit two-run homers.

Athletics 6, Twins 3: Shea Langeliers hit his 27th home run, Tyler Soderstrom extended his hitting streak to 17 games and the visiting Athletics beat Minnesota.

Rookie slugger Nick Kurtz went 3-for-3 with two walks, including a leadoff double in the first inning and an RBI double that capped a three-run fourth.

Reds 6, Angels 4: Hunter Greene had 12 strikeouts in 6⅓ innings, Noelvi Marte homered, doubled and drove in two runs, and visiting Cincinnati beat Los Angeles.

Jose Trevino scored on a sacrifice fly by TJ Friedl and Gavin Lux followed with an RBI double off Kenley Jansen (5-3) in the ninth inning to give the Reds a 6-4 lead.

Diamondbacks 6, Guardians 5: Lourdes Gurriel Jr. drove in three runs, Jake McCarthy hit a solo homer and host Arizona beat Cleveland.

McCarthy finished with two hits and Corbin Carroll tripled twice, his fourth game this season with two triples.

Padres 5, Giants 1: Nick Pivetta allowed a leadoff homer by Jung Hoo Lee and then settled down to tie his season high with 10 strikeouts in six innings and lead host San Diego to a victory against San Francisco.

The Padres snapped a four-game losing streak and remained two games behind the Los Angeles Dodgers in the NL West.

Witt joins select company with 100th HR

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Bobby Witt Jr. knew the ball was gone the moment it left his bat.

Only later did the young Kansas City Royals star realize what kind of company it allowed him to join.

The two-run shot in the eighth inning against Texas on Tuesday night merely padded the lead for Kansas City, which went on to a 5-2 victory. It was the fifth straight win for the Royals, who closed to within 2½ games of an AL wild-card berth.

But it was also the 100th career homer for Witt, making him the youngest in franchise history to reach that mark. He made it at the age of 25 years, 66 days, faster than Carlos Beltran when he accomplished it during the 2003 season.

"I want him up there every inning," Kansas City manager Matt Quatraro said. "I mean, you look at the lineup and you're trying to figure out, 'How many times can we get to the plate?'"

How many guys can we keep on base for him when he does come to the plate?"

"I mean, that's an immense amount of pressure on a younger player to understand that's how everybody feels about him," Quatraro said. "But he has the physical ability, the makeup and the mental capacity to handle it."

The latest no-doubt shot, which came off Rangers reliever Cole Winn and landed an estimated 449 feet to dead center field, made Witt only the fourth player with at least 100 homers and 100 stolen bases through his first four big league seasons. The others are Julio Rodríguez, Darryl Strawberry and Bobby Bonds — some pretty select company.

Witt also became one of six shortstops in the last 95 years to hit at least 100 homers through his age-25 seasons. That list of luminaries includes Alex Rodríguez, Cal Ripken Jr., Francisco Lindor, Carlos Correa and Han-

ley Ramírez; of those players, only Rodríguez and Ramírez also had 100 steals by the time they were 25 years old.

"It was special," Witt admitted, "just seeing the kind of names on the list or whatever they showed. But now, it's just kind of on to the next. It was special. We enjoy it. And now it's just onto the next game."

They keep getting more important for the Royals, who have won five straight and seven of their last eight. They went into the third game of their four-game set against Texas on Wednesday night with a chance to inch closer to a wild-card spot, and they proved last year that they could do some postseason damage if they can only get in.

Witt continues to be the catalyst of their second-half surge, too. He's hitting .291 with 18 homers and 69 RBIs.

"It's special when he goes out there," said Kansas City's Seth Lugo, who allowed just two runs on three hits while pitching into

the seventh inning Tuesday night. "I've been saying it for two years: He goes about his business the same way. He doesn't get up or down on himself. He's a master of consistency. That's what he does."

Witt also happens to be a slick fielder with a Gold Glove in his trophy case.

But at the plate is where Witt has become a bona fide star. He led the majors with a .332 average last year, when he hit 32 home runs, stole 31 bases and finished with 109 RBIs. And while he may not quite replicate the average, homer total or RBI numbers in this campaign, he already has 32 stolen bases while getting caught just seven times.

"There's not too many guys that get to 100 (homers)," said Vinnie Pasquantino, who also homered Tuesday night. "And the fourth player in MLB history with 100 stolen bases? It's not a list I'll ever be on. I mean, it's kind of unbelievable."

No. 6 Notre Dame names Carr starting QB over Minchey

Associated Press

Notre Dame coach Marcus Freeman named second-year quarterback CJ Carr his starting quarterback Tuesday, ending the preseason competition with Kenny Minchey.

The announcement was made on the official social media account of the Fighting Irish football program.

Carr made one appearance for Notre Dame during last season's run to the national championship game, but has not thrown a college pass. He played in the second half of a historic 66-7 rout at Purdue last season.

He was a three-time all-state quarterback in Michigan and is the son of former Wolverines football player Jason Carr and the grandson of former Michigan coach Lloyd Carr.

Minchey appeared in three games with the Irish in 2023 and completed both of his attempts for 12 yards. He also appeared in last year's Purdue game, completing his only pass of the season for 4 yards and rushing two times for 12 yards. He scored his first TD on a 7-yard run.

QB Bachmeier makes BYU history

PROVO, Utah — Bear Bachmeier will be the first true freshman to start a season at quarterback in BYU history.

Bachmeier emerged from a three-way competition to replace Jake Retzlaff and the team announced he will be the starter Aug. 30 against Portland State in a social media post on Tuesday.

BYU had an unexpected quarterback competition this fall after Retzlaff opted to transfer to Tulane rather than face a potential seven-game suspension from the school. Retzlaff had a sexual assault lawsuit against him dismissed, but acknowledged having consensual sex in his defense, a violation of the school's honor code asking students to abstain from premarital sex.

That left the Cougars with a competition between Bachmeier, McCae Hillstead and Treyson Bourguet. McCae previously played at Utah State and Bourguet at Western Michigan, but Bachmeier impressed head coach Kalani Sitake and his staff enough to beat out

the two more experienced quarterbacks.

Texas' Manning: No NFL plans

AUSTIN, Texas — There's so much speculation about Texas quarterback Arch Manning's future, in the media and even within his own family, that it can be hard for him to keep up.

On Tuesday, Manning insisted he's not plotting out how long he'll stay at Texas or when he'll enter the NFL draft, despite his grandfather's recent prediction to Texas Monthly magazine that he'll be with the Longhorns through the 2026 season.

Arch Manning has been careful while talking about his future as he leads the No. 1 Longhorns as the full-time starter after playing behind Quinn Ewers the past two seasons. Manning enters this season as the early favorite for the Heisman Trophy, has endorsement deals worth millions and comes from the most famous quarterbacking family in football. Grandfather Archie played in the NFL and uncles Peyton and Eli combined for four Super Bowl victories.