

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Rats help clear Cambodian minefields

By JOSEPH DITZLER

Stars and Stripes

SIEM REAP, Cambodia — An hour's drive north on Route 66, beyond the tourist gaggle at the temple complex around Angkor Wat, work goes on to clear away the vestiges of three decades of war.

The key workers — African giant pouch rats — keep their noses on the job. This year in Cambodia, the rats and their human handlers have cleared hundreds of acres of land mines and unexploded munitions, making way for local farmers.

In early November, the teams were finishing up 70 acres just off the highway and past a two-room, wooden Cambodian farmhouse on stilts, over a muddy pasture and through a grove of cashew trees.

"From the time we started working, we've already cleared 13.25 hectares," or 33 acres, said Mark Shukuru, senior technical adviser for APOPO, a nongovernmental agency that trains rats to sniff out mines. "Up till now we've pulled 14 mines" and have found nine unexploded ordnances.

APOPO — one of several organizations clearing mines under the auspices of the Cambodian Mine Action Center — expected to finish that site by Nov. 29 and

move on to another. The cleared acreage will be handed off in a ceremony Dec. 29 to local Cambodians, said Michael Heiman, APOPO program manager in Cambodia, in an email Nov. 27.

APOPO is a Dutch acronym for Anti-Personnel Landmines Detection Product Development.

Minefields and other leftover munitions are a diminishing threat in Cambodia, thanks to the Cambodians themselves, nongovernmental agencies and foreign governments — Japan and the United States included. Today, far more Cambodians die in traffic accidents than are killed by land mines.

But they're still a threat.

Founded in Belgium in 1997, APOPO is unique in developing rats as minesweepers, Heiman said.

The rats are very efficient, he said. They alert handlers to the chemical explosives, not the metallic parts that trigger electromagnetic mine detectors. The rats over three years increased APOPO mine-clearing efficiency by about 25%, according to the organization's 2018 annual report.

Overall, APOPO this year cleared 509 acres in Cambodia, finding and destroying

over 600 mines and other unexploded leftovers of war, Heiman wrote.

The animals are captured wild in Tanzania and bred. The next generation is trained to detect mines. The training success rate is about 93%, Shukuru said.

In the field, the rats work from 6-9:30 a.m., when they're most alert and before the Cambodian day becomes too hot.

On a typical day, teams of rats and handlers must clear about 3,300 square feet, working pre-marked rectangles of about 1,100 square feet. Each rat works with two handlers per section. Once a rat becomes fatigued, another waiting nearby takes its place.

If the rat alerts, the handlers mark the spot and move on. A de-mining team comes by later to remove the land mine if they find one. Random plots are rechecked to guarantee they're mine-free.

The hardworking rats earn a regular bonus.

"At the end of the week, we give them a big bunch of food," Shukuru said. "The seventh day is a holiday. We're giving them watermelons, sweet potatoes, corn, carrots to enjoy their weekend."

Study: Army suicide rise not linked to combat

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

Suicide rates among active-duty U.S. soldiers significantly increased during America's lengthy wars in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq, reversing an earlier historical trend in which rates dropped during wartime, a study found.

The study published Dec. 13 in JAMA Network Open suggests the uptick in active-duty Army suicide rates over the past two decades might not be associated with combat, as has been often assumed.

"There appears to be a paradigm shift that happens with

the so-called 'endless wars' — Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan," said Jeffrey Smith, a history professor at the University of Hawaii-Hilo and a co-author of the study.

"From a historical standpoint, rates did not increase during wartime, which is part of why we're starting to try to look at these increases from a multifactorial perspective," he said Thursday. "There's probably other factors at play in these increases in rates beyond a singular fixation on combat exposure as the primary driver of what's going on."

Researchers from the University of Hawaii and the De-

fense Department examined records dating to 1819, the first such in-depth look at military suicide rates. The Army was chosen to review because it is the nation's largest service branch.

Researchers found distinct periods of lower and higher suicide rates, a finding that suggests active-duty suicide rates are not necessarily linked to wartime combat.

A big jump in the suicide rate in the late 1800s came at a time of no major wars and then declined without the military implementing a suicide-prevention program, which "seems to speak to larger factors at play,"

Smith said.

The findings dovetail with several recent studies that found deployment does not increase the risk of suicide for active-duty personnel. The Defense Department's annual report on suicide released in September described it as a "misconception" to link deployment — including combat experience, length of deployment, and number of deployments — with greater risk of suicide.

It noted, for example, that of the active-duty service members who died by suicide in 2017, 41.7% had no history of deployment.

Ramstein airmen prepare for closure of their dining facility

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — The 1950s-era base dining facility that serves some 1,300 airmen here will close next month for up to two years to undergo major upgrades, base officials said last week.

During the closure, most airmen who live in the dorms on Ramstein will have to find somewhere else to have their meals. On the plus side, they'll receive more than \$700 a month to compensate for the loss of access to the Rheinland Dining Facility, which for many is the cheapest and most convenient dining option.

The doors to the Rheinland Dining Facility are slated to shut on Jan. 15, said Lt. Col. Brandi Rountree, commander of the 786th Force Support

Squadron.

"This is going to be a large lifestyle change for the airmen that utilize this dining facility," she said.

The only full-service dining facility on base, the Rheinland DFAC is located near most of the dormitories. It serves three meals a day, seven days a week, and offers a main line with hot food, a snack line and sandwich bar, a salad bar, soup and takeout.

The Ramstein venue serves between 252,000 and 260,000 customers annually, or about 700 meals a day, said Master Sgt. Daniel Whiteman, the Rheinland facility manager.

About \$7.2 million in renovation and structural work is planned. The entire floor and supports underneath it will be replaced, as will grills and hood-and-duct systems.

The serving area will be expanded and the salad bar revamped, Whiteman said.

"For USAFE, this is the No. 1 priority building" for renovations, he said. "It's a long time overdue."

Town halls were held at Ramstein to inform airmen of the closure and present them with options on where to get inexpensive, healthy meals. Officials also advised them to budget their food allowance wisely.

Those who live on Kapaun, which also has a dining facility, will qualify for standard BAS (about \$369 per month) if they work on Ramstein.

To make the closure of the Rheinland facility easier, base officials plan to offer more cooking classes in the dorms and equip some dorm rooms with mini refrigerators.

Military has no policy on troop's use of TikTok

By IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

TikTok user @Shreddedphotog's dance with a banana to the sounds of "This Is How We Do It" garnered some attention last month on the video-sharing app, but it was a six-second clip of him flexing his bulging biceps that went viral.

"You are so into yourself," says a woman he hadn't noticed entering the room, and @Shreddedphotog — also known as Marine Sgt. David Bickel — flashes an embarrassed grin that has earned him 1.6 million views.

The clips show a lighter side of the Marine Corps on an app that has grown in popularity with young people who might someday think about signing up. But TikTok's Chinese ownership has some lawmakers and military officials concerned that it could be used to gather intelligence on Americans.

The military generally tells its personnel not to disclose sensitive information on social networks and to avoid installing apps that might compromise personal or sensitive data. But there is no uniform policy on TikTok.

"Tik Tok is a cybersecurity threat," the Navy Marine Corps Intranet stated Wednesday in a user bulletin, adding that anyone with the app on their mobile devices wouldn't be allowed to use the intranet.

TikTok is growing in popularity because the videos are short and easy to view, Marine Sgt. Courtney White said.

Service members who spoke with Stars and Stripes said they're generally aware of operational security and risks associated with social media. However, those platforms are where young adults and prospective service members can be reached.

NDAA will help spouses maintain careers

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Frequent military moves for Navy spouse Andrea Krull involves not only the challenges of uprooting her life but also maintaining her business as a public relations consultant. With each move to a new state, she would have to reestablish her residence and reregister her small business, costing time and money.

"Every time you move, not only does every state have different rules about registering your [limited liability corporation], but every county and city also has different rules," Krull said. "And so every time we move, I'm putting everything on hold for the actual physical move ... And then I'm needing to go in and make sure that I'm addressing all of the correct

administrative things I need to do to get reestablished in every state."

The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act includes a provision to amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to allow military spouses to use the same state of residence as their service member for any reason to include for the purposes of registering a business.

The legislation also included the transfer of professional licenses for spouses when they move.

For spouses who have professional licenses for their jobs, multiple moves to different states forces them to recertify and pay fees for new licenses with each move.

More than 34% of military spouses need a state license to work in their field, such as teachers or nurses, according

to the office of Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H. The NDAA authorized the Defense Department to work with states on developing agreements on state licensing standards to help with the transfer of licenses for spouses when they move.

There is a separate section in the NDAA that increases the amount spouses can be reimbursed by the military for relocating from \$500 to \$1,000.

At one time, spouses would have to change their state of residence each time they moved while service members could retain their residence regardless of where the military moved them. The 2009 Military Spouse Residency Relief Act allowed spouses to take on the same state residency as their service member for tax and voting purposes.

US boosts efforts to seize land for wall

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Three years into Donald Trump's presidency, the U.S. government is ramping up its efforts to seize private land in Texas to build a border wall.

Trump's signature campaign promise has consistently faced political, legal and environmental obstacles in Texas, which has the largest section of the U.S.-Mexico border, most of it without fencing. And much of the land along the Rio Grande, the river that forms the border in Texas, is privately held and environmentally sensitive.

Almost no land has been taken so far. But Department of Justice lawyers have filed three lawsuits this month seeking to take property from land-

owners. On Tuesday, lawyers moved to seize land in one case immediately before a scheduled court hearing in February.

The agency says it's ready to file many more petitions to take private land in the coming weeks. While progress has lagged, the process of taking land under eminent domain is weighted heavily in the government's favor.

The U.S. government has built about 90 miles of walls since Trump took office, almost all of it replacing old fencing. Reaching Trump's oft-stated goal of 500 miles by the end of 2020 will almost certainly require stepping up progress in Texas.

Opponents have lobbied Congress to limit funding and prevent construction in areas

like the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, an important sanctuary for several endangered species of jaguars, birds and other animals, as well as the nonprofit National Butterfly Center and a historic Catholic chapel. They have also filed several lawsuits.

A federal judge this month prevented the government from building with money redirected to the wall under Trump's declaration of a national emergency earlier this year. Also, two judges recently ordered a private, pro-Trump fundraising group to stop building its own wall near the Rio Grande.

Even on land the government owns, construction has been held up. In another federal wildlife refuge, at a site known as La Parida Banco, work crews

cleared brush last spring and the government announced in April that construction would soon begin. Eight months later, the site remains empty.

According to a U.S. official familiar with the project, work crews discovered that the land was too saturated. The planned metal bollards installed on top of concrete panels would have been unstable because of the water levels in the soil, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person did not have authorization to share the information publicly.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection declined to comment on the issue of saturation at La Parida Banco, saying construction there was "currently in the design phase."

White House: Pelosi will yield on impeachment delay

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House tried to make the case Sunday that Speaker Nancy Pelosi has put herself in an untenable position by stalling House-passed articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump in hopes of shaping the upcoming Senate trial.

A senior administration official suggested the top Democrat in Congress would soon relent, paving the way for leaders in the Republican-controlled Senate to settle on the contours of a trial that is likely to result in Trump's acquittal on charges of obstruction of Congress and abuse of power. An influential senator and key Trump ally predicted that the drive by Pelosi, D-Calif. and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., for new witnesses and testimony would be for naught.

"She will yield. There's no way she can hold this position," said Marc Short, the chief of staff to Vice President Mike Pence. "We think her case is

going nowhere."

The House voted last week to impeach Trump, who became only the third president in U.S. history to be formally charged with "high crimes and misdemeanors." Pelosi has declined to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate until Republicans provide details on witnesses and testimony.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and Schumer have been at an impasse over the issue, leaving open the possibility of a protracted delay until the articles are delivered.

McConnell has all but promised an easy acquittal of the president. McConnell appears to have united Republicans behind an approach that would begin the trial with presentations and arguments before he tries drawing the proceedings to a close.

That has sparked a fight with Pelosi and Schumer, who are demanding trial witnesses who refused to appear during House committee hearings.

6 killed and 13 injured in Las Vegas apartment fire

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A fire in a three-story apartment building in downtown Las Vegas where residents were apparently using their stoves for heat killed six people and forced some residents to jump from upper-floor windows to escape the heavy smoke before dawn Saturday, authorities said.

Investigators reported that the fire started around a first-floor unit's stove and that residents had told them that there was no heat in the building, which sits a few blocks from downtown Las Vegas' touristy Fremont Street District.

Firefighters arriving at the scene began treating injured and using ladders to rescue numerous people already jumping or hanging from windows, fire department spokesman Tim Szymanski said.

"The first thing that you think of is: We've got to rescue those people," he said. "A fall of 16 feet or higher can be fatal."

Thirteen people were in-

jured, mostly from smoke inhalation, but victims also had fractures, Szymanski said.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that a pregnant woman in her first trimester fell after her hands slipped on a rope of bedsheets while descending from her third-floor apartment, leaving her with multiple fractures. Her husband told the newspaper that medical personnel told him the fetus' heartbeat appeared strong.

Three people were found dead in the apartment where the fire started, Szymanski said.

It wasn't immediately clear if anyone died after falling or jumping from windows, Szymanski said. No firefighters were injured.

The cause of the fire appeared to be accidental, and the fire was largely contained to the first-floor unit where it started in the stove area, Szymanski said. Firefighters found the burners on, Szymanski said.

N. Korean meeting eyes steps to boost military

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Sunday leader Kim Jong Un has convened a key ruling party meeting to decide on steps to bolster the country's military capability.

The meeting came amid speculation that the North could abandon diplomacy with the U.S. and launch either a long-range missile or a satellite-carrying rocket if Washington doesn't accept its demand for new incentives to salvage faltering nuclear negotiations by year's end.

The Korean Central News Agency said Kim presided over a meeting of the Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party. It didn't say when it took place.

It cited Kim as saying the meeting would determine "important organizational and political measures and military steps to bolster up the overall armed forces ... as required by the fast-changing situation and crucial time of the developing Korean revolution."

According to KCNA, the gathering decided on "important military issues and measures for organizing or expanding and reorganizing new units ... (and) changing

the affiliation of some units and changing deployment of (others)."

KCNA didn't elaborate. But South Korean media speculated the meeting might have discussed the restructuring of military units over the deployment of new weapons that the North had test-launched in recent months, and what steps it will take in coming weeks.

North Korea is to hold a higher level Workers' Party gathering, a Central Committee meeting, later this month to discuss what it previously described as "crucial issues" in line with "the changed situation at home and abroad."

In Washington, the White House said President Donald Trump discussed "recent threatening statements" by North Korea in a phone call with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The two leaders agreed to continue close communication, it said.

Earlier this month, North Korea carried out two major tests at its long-range rocket and missile engine testing site. Experts said they were engine tests that indicate that North might be preparing for a banned satellite launch or an intercontinental ballistic missile test.

Man who used narwhal tusk to stop attack ID'd

Associated Press

LONDON — A mysterious figure who used a rare narwhal tusk to help subdue a knife-wielding extremist on London Bridge last month has been identified as a civil servant in Britain's Justice Ministry.

Darryn Frost broke his silence Saturday, telling Britain's Press Association that he and others reacted instinctively when Usman Khan started stabbing people at a prison rehabilitation program at Fishmongers' Hall next to the bridge Nov. 29.

Frost used the rare narwhal tusk that he grabbed from the wall to help subdue Khan even though the attacker claimed to be about to detonate a suicide vest, which turned out to be a fake device with no explosives. The intervention of Frost and others helped keep the death count to two.

He said another man used a chair as a weapon in the desperate struggle.

"When we heard the noise from the floor below, a few of us rushed to the scene," the 38-year-old said. "I took a narwhal tusk from the wall and used it to defend myself and others from the attacker. Another man was holding the attacker at bay with a wooden chair."

He said Khan had two large knives, one in each hand, and pointed at his midriff.

"He turned and spoke to me, then indicated he had an explosive device around his waist," Frost said.

"At this point, the man next to me threw his chair at the attacker, who then started running towards him with knives raised above his head."

The confrontation quickly moved onto London Bridge, where Frost and others — including one man who sprayed Khan with a fire extinguisher — managed to fight the attacker to the ground until police arrived.

The extremist, who had served prison time for earlier terrorism offenses, was shot dead by police moments later after he threatened again to detonate his vest.

There had been much speculation in the British media about the identity of the man who used the narwhal tusk in such a dangerous situation.

He was one of a handful of people who defied danger to help keep Khan from doing even more damage in the crowded hall and on the bridge.

Frost said he was "eternally grateful" to the former prisoners and the members of the public who were taking part in the meeting and ran to help.

Frost said he was withholding many details out of respect for the victims and their families and because of the ongoing investigation.

Boeing capsule returns after mishap

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Boeing safely landed its crew capsule in the New Mexico desert Sunday after an aborted flight to the International Space Station that threatened to set back the company's effort to launch astronauts for NASA next year.

The Starliner descended into the Army's White Sands Missile Range in the frigid predawn darkness, ending a two-day demo that should have lasted more than a week. A trio of red, white and blue parachutes popped open and airbags also inflated around the spacecraft to ease the impact.

"Congratulations, Starliner," said Mission Control, calling it a successful touchdown.

A test dummy named Rosie the Rocketeer — after Rosie the Riveter from World War II — rode in the commander's seat. Also returning were holiday presents, clothes and food that should have been delivered to the space station crew.

After seeing this first test flight cut short and the space station docking canceled because of an improperly set clock on the capsule, Boeing employees were relieved to get the Starliner back.

It was the first American-made capsule designed for astronauts to make a ground landing after returning from orbit.

The capsule's first trip to space began with a smooth rocket ride from Cape Canaveral on Friday. But barely a half-hour into the flight, it failed to fire its thrusters to give chase to the space station and ended up in the wrong orbit.

The problem was with the Starliner's internal clock. It did not sync up with the Atlas V rocket, throwing off the capsule's timing.

The capsule burned so much fuel trying to orient itself in orbit that there wasn't enough left for a space station rendezvous.

Boeing is still trying to figure out how the timing error occurred.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man pleads guilty to operating ship drunk

CA SAN FRANCISCO — A Ukrainian man pleaded guilty to being intoxicated while operating a cargo ship in San Francisco Bay, the U.S. attorney's office announced.

Vadim Humenyuk, 51, of Izmail acknowledged that he was under the influence while serving as master, or head officer, of the Rainbow Quest on Dec. 10, authorities said.

The 590-foot-long Gibraltar-flagged bulk carrier had fueled up in the bay and was preparing to sail to South Korea when a bar pilot notified the Coast Guard that Humenyuk appeared to be intoxicated.

Site informs when snowplow might arrive

NV RENO — Lake Tahoe-area residents stuck in snow, hoping to go and waiting for their road to be cleared have a new way to see when a snowplow might arrive.

Washoe County Roads began posting a snowplow monitoring system featuring an interactive map showing where trucks are operating in Incline Village and Crystal Bay in nearly real-time.

County Community Services Operations chief Eric Crump said that by equipping trucks with automated vehicle locator technology, people can see which areas have been plowed.

Family discovers owl in Christmas tree

GA ATLANTA — A Georgia family got a real hoot from its Christmas tree: More than a week after they bought it, they discovered a live owl nestled among its branches.

Katie McBride Newman said that she and her daughter spotted the bird Dec. 12. They had bought the 10-foot tall tree from a Home Depot, taken it back to their Atlanta area home and decorated it.

The Chattahoochee Nature Center caught the bird and helped the family release it.

Principal apologizes after seizing pizzas

IA DES MOINES — A Des Moines middle school principal apologized for denying students pizzas that had already been delivered to their classroom for a year-end pizza party promised by their teacher.

Brody Middle School Principal Thomas Hoffman intercepted the pizzas last week, citing a school fairness policy. That led parent Neil Erickson to post about the incident on social media, saying his son and his classmates were unfairly denied and that their teacher was "left in tears."

Hoffman issued a public apology, saying he was "overly strict" in applying the school's standards.

Several restaurants planned to send pizzas to the school, the newspaper reported.

Car is stolen with sleeping man inside

NM LAS CRUCES — A New Mexico man faces charges after authorities said he stole a car without knowing that another man was sleeping inside.

Joseph Allen, 40, of Las Cruces was arrested in connection with the theft of the running car in Vado, the Las Cruces Sun-News reported.

According to the Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office, Ignacio Baca, of Las Cruces, told

authorities the episode began after he fell asleep in the back seat of his girlfriend's 2006 Toyota Corolla.

Baca told Dona Ana County Sheriff's Detective Ileana Adame that he'd left the vehicle running while he was sleeping, and later woke up and realized the car was traveling east on Interstate 10.

Allen faces several charges, including aggravated battery with a deadly weapon and auto burglary.

Temple rededicating stolen menorah

MA BROOKLINE — A 500-pound menorah stolen from a Jewish temple in a Boston suburb last year was rededicated after being recovered and repaired.

The Boston Globe reported the six-foot-tall copper menorah was one of two that had stood on the grounds of Temple Emeth in Brookline since 1948.

It was ripped from the cement in the temple's rotunda in November 2018 and found badly broken on a street in Boston's West Roxbury neighborhood.

The owners of an auto body shop near the temple and other local residents helped restore the structure free of charge.

Police: Heads from snowmen returned

PA STROUDSBURG — Police in northeastern Pennsylvania said that suspects returned the decapitated heads from four snowmen placed around town as a holiday promotion and arts project.

Stroud Area Regional Police said the group of vandals captured on video in Stroudsburg came forward and admitted what happened.

The project led by the Go

Collaborative picked artists for each snowman, which organizers say cost about \$2,000 apiece to manufacture before they were painted and otherwise decorated.

Police seek victims in nude photo ring

GA TRENTON — Police officials in Georgia's northwestern corner said as many as 50 adults and minors may be victims of a group of people trading sexually explicit photos.

Dade County Sheriff Ray Cross and Trenton Police Chief Christy Smith told local news outlets that they're working with Dade County High School and others to identify victims.

Investigators are urging potential victims to come forward.

Man pays families' past due electric bills

FL GULF BREEZE — A Florida man who once spent a Christmas without electricity is paying it forward. He paid the power bills for 36 families with past due accounts.

Mike Esmond said he will never forget the Christmas he and his three daughters spent in 1983 without heat and power because he couldn't pay his bill. He said it was one of the coldest days on record in Pensacola at only 9 degrees and remembers there were icicles hanging off the window.

The 73-year-old small business owner went to the city of Gulf Breeze this month and requested a list of all utility accounts that were past due and at risk of having their gas and water turned off. He paid off all 36 of them, totaling about \$4,600.

From wire reports

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49ers beat Rams, eye top seed

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — An exhilarating, game-winning drive that put the San Francisco 49ers in position to seize the top seed in the playoffs next week would normally be reason to celebrate.

The mood for the 49ers was far from joyous following a 34-31 victory Saturday night over the Los Angeles Rams because teammates were more concerned about the well-being of third-string quarterback C.J. Beathard, whose younger brother Clayton was fatally stabbed earlier in the day at a Nashville bar.

"It was definitely the toughest game of my career," said an emotional George Kittle, who played with Beathard in college at Iowa and was close to the family.

"Today was absolutely terrible, for me the entire day. It sucked all around. Overall it was just kind of a brutal day. We got that one for C.J. and I'm so happy we were able to do it."

It didn't come easy, as it took Jimmy Garoppolo converting a pair of conversions on

third-and-16 to set up Robbie Gould's game-winning 33-yard field goal with no time left to eliminate the defending NFC champion Rams from playoff contention.

Garoppolo made up for a mostly pedestrian game for the 49ers (12-3) by delivering two big throws on the final drive after taking his fifth and sixth sacks.

"To convert two of those the way we did it was pretty incredible," Garoppolo said.

He found Kendrick Bourne on an 18-yard pass over the middle to convert the first long third down and then hit Emmanuel Sanders behind a blown coverage for 46 yards.

San Francisco had failed on 50 straight third downs when needing at least 16 yards to convert since last doing it in Week 3 in 2017.

"Usually it's such a low percentage that you don't even try on third and 16," coach Kyle Shanahan said. "Usually you just try to survive the down and get half of it."

The Niners then ran down the clock before Gould made

the kick that knocked the Rams (8-7) out of the playoffs. Minnesota became the fifth team to clinch a berth in the NFC with Dallas and Philadelphia battling for the final spot.

"It's extremely disappointing," Rams quarterback Jared Goff said. "You never envision something like this when you start the year. It's not even close to the standard we want to hold. It's sickening."

The victory kept the Niners in control in the race for the NFC's top seed and home-field advantage throughout. They still need to win next week at Seattle to win the NFC West, otherwise they will be relegated to wild-card status.

Garoppolo finished 16-for-27 for 248 yards with one touchdown and two interceptions.

Goff connected on a 22-yard TD pass to Cooper Kupp in the third quarter to put the Rams ahead 28-24. The defense had throttled the Niners, holding them to four punts, one interception and only two first downs in the second half before San Francisco took over at the 9 midway through the fourth quarter.

Texans edge Bucs, win division

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The Houston Texans aren't satisfied with being AFC South champions for the fourth time in five years.

They feel as if they're just getting started and donned T-shirts Saturday declaring: "The South Is Not Enough."

"This is not the ultimate goal. This is one goal to get us to where we want to go," quarterback Deshaun Watson said after the Texans held off the Tampa Bay Buccaneers 23-20 Saturday to ensure another trip to the playoffs.

"For the ultimate goal, we got our shot," Watson added. "We have our opportunities, so we definitely want to celebrate this and build on this one, then finish up next week and get ready for the big show."

The Texans forced five turnovers and Bradley Robby returned one of the four interceptions of Jameis Winston 27 yards for an early touchdown — the sixth pick-6 the Bucs quarterback has thrown this season.

Jahleel Addae's interception with 1:27 remaining, ended any realistic chance the Bucs had of fully overcoming Winston's mistakes.

"Anytime you win a division in this league, it's important," coach Bill O'Brien said. "We've done it four out of the last five years. To win the division with one game left to play says a lot about this team. It's a resilient team. They work hard, they come to work everyday and they try to do what we ask them to do."

The Texans (10-5) won despite not getting an especially sharp performance from Watson, who completed 19 of 32 passes for 184 yards and one interception. The Bucs (7-8) sacked him five times and held Houston to one offensive TD on Carlos Hyde's 1-yard run in the second quarter.

The Texans ended Tampa Bay's four-game winning streak and are AFC South champs for the second straight year.

Pats down Bills, win AFC East

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Tom Brady appeared for his postgame media session with an ice pack on his right elbow. Bill Belichick was sporting a brand new AFC East championship hat.

The New England Patriots had things a little tougher this year, but they came out on top yet again.

Brady passed for 271 yards and a touchdown, sneaked for a third-down conversion to set up another score and threw a downfield block on another scoring drive to help the defending Super Bowl champions beat Buffalo 24-17 on Saturday and clinch their 11th straight AFC East title.

"I'm pretty poor at just about everything other than throwing the ball," said Brady, who is 42

and nursing a right elbow injury but still absorbed a crunching tackle after a 3-yard scramble that was followed one play later by Rex Burkhead's go-ahead touchdown.

"He's the heartbeat of this football team," special teams star Matthew Slater said. "We've been one of the most fortunate organizations the last 20 years to have that guy at the helm. He proved it again tonight."

With the Bills visiting for a rare late-season matchup while the division was still at stake, Burkhead rebounded from an opening-drive fumble to catch four passes for 77 yards and run for 20 more, including a 1-yard touchdown with 5:11 left to give New England the lead. Brady found Julian Edelman, who was in the concussion protocol earlier in the second half, on the 2-point conversion to

make it 24-17.

Both teams had already clinched playoff berths; the Patriots (12-3) remain in contention for a first-round bye or even the No. 1 seed in the AFC.

"You couldn't ask for a better situation, playing for an AFC division title in December with two games left to give yourself a chance," said Bills quarterback Josh Allen, who drove Buffalo to the New England 8 in the final minutes but couldn't deliver a touchdown. "I'm super thankful for this experience and what we were able to do here. At the same time, we came here to win a football game, and we didn't get that done."

With a first-and-goal from the 8, Allen was stopped on a run, overthrew Dawson Knox in the end zone and then was sacked by Adam Butler.

College basketball roundup

Villanova knocks off No. 1 Kansas

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jermaine Samuels spotted up, let the ball fly and — bang — the three-pointer swished, and some 20,000 delirious Villanova fans shook the arena. With time running out, the game on the line, Samuels was fearless.

"I just shot it unconsciously," he said.

He did, and one more No. 1 got KO'd.

Kansas became the latest top-ranked team to fall in the wildest of basketball seasons, another week where it's no fun at No. 1.

Samuels hit the winner with 20.5 seconds left to lead the No. 18 Wildcats to a 56-55 victory on Saturday, and Villanova became the only team to beat KU twice at No. 1 under coach Bill Self.

No. 2 Gonzaga 112, Eastern Washington 77: Filip Petrushev had 24 points and nine rebounds to help the host Bulldogs beat the Eagles, clearing a path to become the sixth top-ranked team in the nation so far this season.

Gonzaga has reached No. 1 several times in recent years,

including twice last season.

No. 5 Ohio State 71, No. 6 Kentucky 65: D.J. Carton had 13 points, Kaleb Wesson added 12 before fouling out and the Buckeyes outlasted the Wildcats in the CBS Sports Classic in Las Vegas.

No. 8 Oregon 84, Texas Southern 78: Payton Pritchard led a late surge to help the Ducks escape an upset scare.

No. 11 Memphis 77, Jackson State 49: Precious Achiuwa had 20 points and nine rebounds and DJ Jeffries added 13 points to help host Memphis beat Jackson State.

No. 12 Auburn 74, Lehigh 51: Austin Wiley had 14 points and 15 rebounds for the host Tigers, at 11-0 the only unbeaten Power Five program and one of four undefeated teams in the country.

Colorado 78, No. 13 Dayton 76 (OT): D'shawn Schwartz nailed a three-pointer at the buzzer, McKinley Wright IV scored a season-high 29 points and the Buffaloes beat the Flyers in Chicago.

No. 14 Michigan 86, Presbyterian 44: Jon Teske scored 11 of his 15 points in the first half and the host Wolverines

cruised past the Blue Hose despite losing Isaiah Livers to an apparent injury.

No. 15 Michigan State 101, Eastern Michigan 48: Cassius Winston had 21 points and seven assists for the host Spartans.

St. John's 70, No. 16 Arizona 67: Nick Rutherford scored the go-ahead basket on a driving layup with 1:03 remaining and the Red Storm beat the Wildcats in the Al Attles Classic in San Francisco despite blowing a 15-point lead in the second half.

No. 17 Butler 70, Purdue 61: Bryce Golden scored 14 points and the host Bulldogs used relentless defense to pull away from the Boilermakers in the Crossroads Classic.

No. 19 Florida State 66, South Florida 60: The Seminoles used smothering defense to overcome a 10-point deficit in the final seven minutes and beat the Bulls in the Orange Bowl Classic in Sunrise, Fla.

No. 20 San Diego State 80, Utah 52: Malachi Flynn scored 16 points and the Aztecs remained one of the nation's four unbeaten teams with the victory over the Utes in the

Basketball Hall of Fame Classic in Los Angeles.

No. 21 Tennessee 75, Jacksonville State 53: Jordan Bowden scored 19 points and the host Volunteers gave coach Rick Barnes his 700th career victory.

No. 24 Texas Tech 68, Texas-Rio Grande Valley 58: Freshman Jahmi'us Ramsey scored 15 points in his return after missing four games with a hamstring injury, and the host Red Raiders overcame another sluggish start.

No. 25 West Virginia 75, Youngstown State 64: Oscar Tshiebwe scored 19 points and Derek Culver added 15 for the visiting Mountaineers.

Drake 85, Air Force 80: Ryan Swan scored a season-high 24 points for the host Falcons (6-7) in a losing effort. Roman Penn had a career-high 22 points to lead the Bulldogs (10-3).

Wagner 82, Army 62: Alex Morales had a season-high 21 points as the host Seahawks easily defeated the Black Knights.

Alex King had 15 points for Army (5-6).

NBA roundup

Giannis has triple-double; Bucks rout hapless Knicks

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Giannis Antetokounmpo had 22 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in his third triple-double of the season, and the Milwaukee Bucks followed their big victory over the Los Angeles Lakers by routing the New York Knicks 123-102 on Saturday.

The Bucks (26-4) made their first six three-pointers to open a big early lead that grew to 29 points.

Rockets 139, Suns 125: James Harden scored 47 points, Westbrook added 30 and the Rockets rolled to their 10th victory in the past 13 games.

Phoenix pulled to 115-107 with 9:37 left

but the Rockets responded with a 21-9 run — which included four three-pointers from Harden — that slowly deflated the Suns' players and crowd.

76ers 125, Wizards 108: Joel Embiid had 21 points and 13 rebounds and Josh Richardson added 21 points to lead Philadelphia over visiting Washington.

Clippers 134, Spurs 109: Los Angeles forward Kawhi Leonard had 26 points, nine assists and seven rebounds in three quarters and won in San Antonio for the first time since leaving the franchise.

Bulls 119, Pistons 107: Zach LaVine scored 33 points and Coby White added 19 to help Chicago outlast short-handed host Detroit.

Trail Blazers 113, Timberwolves 106: Damian Lillard scored 29 points, Hassan Whiteside had 16 points, 22 rebounds and seven blocks, and Portland defeated visiting Minnesota.

Nets 122, Hawks 112: Spencer Dinwiddie scored 39 points and host Brooklyn overcame a 47-point performance by Trae Young.

Jazz 114, Hornets 107: Bojan Bogdanovic scored 26 points, Rudy Gobert had 17 points and 19 rebounds and Utah beat host Charlotte for its fifth straight victory.

Grizzlies 119, Kings 115: Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 18 points, Jae Crowder added 17 points and 10 rebounds, and Memphis beat visiting Sacramento.

Pietrangelo paces Blues past Sharks

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — On a night the St. Louis Blues didn't bring their best game, the defending Stanley Cup champions found a way to grind out a win.

Alex Pietrangelo scored twice in the third period, Jake Allen had 34 saves and the Blues beat the San Jose Sharks 5-2 Saturday night in a rematch of last season's Western Conference finals.

"This group, we just find a

way to win," Pietrangelo said. "It's never easy coming over to the West Coast the day before and sometimes you don't have your legs and I didn't think we did today, but we just found a way."

Pietrangelo finished a 2-on-1 with a shot past Martin Jones for a 3-2 lead with 8:53 left. Pietrangelo and Ryan O'Reilly each added empty-net goals.

Jaden Schwartz scored and had two assists and Jordan Kyrou also scored for the

Blues, who won their fifth straight and improved to 16-2-3 against Western Conference opponents.

"It's character and leadership, that's a big part of it for sure," Blues coach Craig Berube said. "They know how to hang in there and then when the time comes, they push and they win games. We're not always going to have our best stuff, so it's important that you find ways to win those games."

Brent Burns and newly ac-

quired forward Stefan Noesen each scored for San Jose, which has lost eight of nine and three of four since Bob Boughner took over as interim coach after the Sharks fired Peter DeBoer.

The Sharks trailed 2-1 late in the second when Noesen scored in his San Jose debut. Noesen, who the Sharks claimed off waivers from the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday, took a shot after a long pass from Brendan Dillon.

NHL roundup

Silfverberg leads Ducks to shootout defeat of Isles

Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Jakob Silfverberg scored in regulation and added the shootout winner in the Anaheim Ducks' 6-5 win against the New York Islanders on Saturday.

Adam Henrique had a goal and an assist, John Gibson made 28 saves as the Ducks snapped a two-game skid. Max Comtois, Sam Carrick and Cam Fowler also scored for Anaheim.

Anders Lee, Brock Nelson and Mathew Barzal each had a goal and an assist while Semyon Varlamov made 23 saves as the Islanders fell for the second time in three games. Nick Leddy had a goal and two assists, and Jordan Eberle and Derick Brassard each added two assists.

Ryan Pulock tied the game at 5-5 when he blasted a slap shot past Gibson at 13:19 of the third period.

Sabres 3, Kings 2: Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella scored to help host Buffalo end a three-game skid.

Victor Olosson also scored and Linus Ullmark stopped 25 shots as the Sabres bounced back from a 6-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Thursday and improved to 17-13-7.

Jets 3, Wild 0: Blake Wheeler had a goal and assist to become the leading scorer in franchise history, and Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves for his third shutout of the season to lead Winnipeg to a win at Minnesota.

Wheeler's 616 points surpassed the previous mark set by Ilya Kovalchuk, who played for the franchise when it was the Atlanta Thrashers.

Patrick Laine had two goals for the Jets, who had lost three of their past four games. Mark Scheifele scored for the eighth time in nine games, and Nikolaj Ehlers and Logan Shaw also had goals.

Capitals 3, Lightning 1: Dmitry Orlov scored the go-ahead goal with 6:03 left, Braden Holtby made 26 saves and host Washington killed off several late power plays to beat Tampa Bay.

The Capitals outshot the Lightning 35-27 and handed them their third loss in four games. Holtby didn't get tested much in the first two periods but was at his best on a late 5-on-3 penalty kill when he made big stops on Tyler Johnson and Victor Hedman.

Defenseman Radko Gudas scored his first goal with Washington, and Nic Dowd added an empty-netter. The NHL-leading Capitals improved to 5-0-1 in the second half of back-to-backs this season.

Predators 4, Bruins 3 (OT): Ryan Ellis scored with 54.2 seconds left on the clock in overtime to lift Nashville to a win at stumbling Boston.

Roman Josi had two goals, Filip Forsberg also scored and Pekka Rinne stopped 29 shots to help the Predators finish a four-game road trip at 3-0-1.

Patrice Bergeron scored twice and Par Lindholm had the other goal for the Bruins, who have won just once in their last eight games (1-5-2). Jaroslav Halak finished with 25 saves.

Flyers 5, Senators 4 (SO): Sean Couturier scored the shootout winner to lift Philadelphia to a win at Ottawa.

James van Riemsdyk had two goals in regulation to lead the Flyers. Kevin Hayes and Jakub Voracek also scored, and Brian

Elliott made 30 saves.

Panthers 4, Hurricanes 2: Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and an assist in the third period, Chris Dreidger stopped 42 shots, and visiting Florida won its third straight.

Brian Boyle, Evgenii Dadanov, and Noel Acciari also scored for the Panthers. Driedger won for the second time in three starts this season.

Maple Leafs 4, Red Wings 1: Michael Hutchinson made 29 saves in his first win of the season and host Toronto got its fourth straight win.

Zach Hyman and Auston Matthews each had two goals and an assist for the Maple Leafs, who won with their backup for the first time this season.

Blue Jackets 5, Devils 1: Oliver Bjorkstrand scored twice in the first period, Joonas Korpisalo stopped 21 shots and host Columbus cruised past New Jersey.

Vladislav Gavrikov, Zach Werenski and Gustav Nyquist also scored for the Blue Jackets, who won their fourth straight despite being ravaged by injuries. They have earned at least one point in a season-high seven consecutive games (5-0-2).

Oilers 4, Canadiens 3: Riley Sheahan got the tiebreaking goal in the third period, lifting host Edmonton past Montreal.

Blackhawks 5, Avalanche 3: Dominik Kubalik scored the go-ahead goal with 3:17 left and Chicago rallied to win at Colorado.

Canucks 4, Penguins 1: Jake Virtanen and J.T. Miller scored power-play goals in the first period to lead host Vancouver over Pittsburgh.

Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser also scored for the Canucks.