

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Taliban council agrees to cease-fire

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban's ruling council agreed Sunday to a temporary cease-fire in Afghanistan, providing a window in which a peace agreement with the United States can be signed, officials from the insurgent group said. They didn't say when it would begin.

A cease-fire, which had been demanded by Washington before any peace agreement could be signed, would allow the U.S. to bring home its troops from Afghanistan and end its 18-year military engagement there, America's longest.

There was no immediate response from Washington.

The U.S. wants any deal to include a promise from the Taliban that Afghanistan would not be used as a base by terrorist groups. The U.S. currently has an estimated 12,000 troops in Afghanistan.

The Taliban chief must approve the cease-fire decision but that was expected. The duration of the cease-fire was

not specified but it was suggested it would last for 10 days. A member of the Rasoul group, a breakaway Taliban faction, told Stars and Stripes some Taliban leaders still have disagreements over the cease-fire.

Four members of the Taliban negotiating team met for a week with the ruling council before they agreed on the brief cease-fire. The negotiating team returned Sunday to Qatar, where the Taliban maintain their political office and where U.S. special peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has been holding peace talks with the religious militia since September 2018.

Talks were suspended in September when both sides seemed on the verge of signing a peace pact. However, a surge in violence in the capital, Kabul, killed a U.S. soldier, prompting President Donald Trump to declare the deal "dead." Talks resumed after Trump made a surprise visit to Afghanistan at the end of November announcing the Taliban were ready to talk and agree to a reduction in

violence.

Khalilzad returned to Doha at the beginning of December. It was then that he proposed a temporary halt to hostilities to pave the way to an agreement being signed, according to Taliban officials.

Taliban officials familiar with the negotiations spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to media outlets.

A key pillar of the agreement, which the U.S. and Taliban have been hammering out for more than a year, is direct negotiations between Afghans on both sides of the conflict.

Those intra-Afghan talks were expected to be held within two weeks of the signing of a U.S.-Taliban peace deal. They will decide what a post-war Afghanistan will look like.

The first item on the agenda is expected to address how to implement a cease-fire between the Taliban and Afghanistan's National Security Forces.

The intra-Afghan talks would also lay out the fate of tens of

thousands of Taliban fighters and the heavily armed militias belonging to Afghanistan's warlords.

Those warlords have amassed wealth and power since the Taliban were ousted from power in 2001 by the U.S.-led coalition. They were removed after Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. The Taliban had harbored bin Laden, although there was no indication they were aware of al-Qaida's plans to attack the United States.

Even as the Taliban were talking about ceasing hostilities, insurgents carried out an attack in northern Afghanistan on Sunday that killed at least 17 local militiamen.

The attack apparently targeted a local militia commander who escaped unharmed, said Jawad Hajri, a spokesman for the governor of Takhar province, where the attack took place late Saturday.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed responsibility for the attack.

False alarms sound amid expected 'gift' from N. Korea

BY SETH ROBSON
AND MATTHEW KEELER
Stars and Stripes

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not deliver on his promise of a Christmas gift to President Donald Trump but U.S. troops and a Japanese broadcaster were ready if he did.

Two false alarms sounded Thursday night and Friday morning hundreds of miles and hours apart in South Korea and Japan, both erroneously signaling alerts of a possible North Korean attack.

The first, around 10 p.m. Thursday, occurred when an alarm sounded at Camp Casey, a U.S. military base just south of the Demilitarized Zone. An unofficial Twitter

account, U.S. Army WTF! Moments, called it a "Go to War" signal.

Lt. Col. Martyn Crighton, a 2nd Infantry Division spokesman, said Friday the alert siren was sounded inadvertently instead of taps.

"It was human error that caused the mistake," he said. "When the operator realized that he pushed the wrong button, they notified all the units on Camp Casey that it was a false alarm."

Since units on the base were immediately notified that the siren was a false alarm, it did not interfere with any operations, Crighton said.

Then, at 12:22 a.m. Friday, Japanese state broadcaster NHK erroneously re-

ported that a North Korean missile had landed in the sea near the northern island of Hokkaido.

A few minutes later the broadcaster issued a correction, stating that the report was a training text.

On Sunday, The Associated Press reported that North Korea has opened a high-profile political conference to discuss how to overcome "harsh trials and difficulties," according to state media.

The ruling Workers' Party meeting is a focus of keen attention as some observers predict North Korea might use the conference to announce it would abandon faltering diplomacy with the U.S. and lift its moratorium on major weapons test.

US retaliates for rocket attacks in Iraq

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

IRBIL, Iraq — The U.S. military struck five facilities used by an Iran-backed militia in Iraq and Syria blamed for a rocket attack that killed an American contractor.

The Pentagon said Sunday the move was in response to a series of such rocket attacks on Iraqi bases where American troops are deployed as part of the anti-Islamic State coalition Operation Inherent Resolve.

“These locations included weapon storage facilities and command and control locations that [Shiite militia Kata’ib Hezbollah] uses to plan and execute attacks on OIR coalition forces,” Jonathan Hoffman, chief Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement.

The news comes two days after a barrage of 30 rockets struck the K1 base in Kirkuk, killing a U.S. civilian contractor and wounding four American service members and two Iraqi troops as forces were preparing for an anti-ISIS operation.

Hoffman attributed that strike to Kata’ib Hezbollah, using the initials KH. Also known as the Hezbollah Brigades, the Shiite militia has close ties to Iran and the Lebanese militant group of the same name and was one of several groups that fought U.S. troops after the 2003 invasion.

“KH has a strong linkage with Iran’s Quds Force and has repeatedly received lethal aid and other support from Iran that it has used to attack OIR coalition forces,” Hoffman said, calling on the group to cease its attacks or face further strikes.

U.S. officials began warning of heightened threat indications from Iran and its proxies last summer as tensions between Washington and Tehran mounted. The threatened escalation followed harsh sanctions the Trump administration imposed after backing out of an Obama-era nuclear deal with the hardline Iranian regime.

Since then, the two sides have downed each other’s drones and traded blame over a series of attacks in the region.

An Iraqi general told The Associated Press on Sunday that security had been beefed up around the sprawling al-Asad Air Base that hosts U.S. troops in the western Anbar desert following a series of such rocket attacks throughout Iraq, including one on that base earlier this month. The attacks remain under investigation, Maj. Gen. Raad Mahmoud told the AP.

The U.S. strikes hit three sites in Iraq and two in Syria, Hoffman said.

Local media reported strikes were conducted near the Iraq-Syria border, including on a Kata’ib head-quarters in al-Qaim. Five people were reportedly killed and several others wounded, early reports state.

Meanwhile, U.S.-backed Iraqi security forces launched their latest large-scale operation to hunt down ISIS insurgents at dawn Sunday — the eighth iteration of a campaign dubbed “Will of Victory,” focused on lasting defeat of the terrorist group.

“These operations aim to search and clear areas, vil-

lages and open spaces, to track and arrest wanted persons, dry up the remnants of terrorism and maintain stability and security,” Lt. Gen. Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah, the Iraqi army’s deputy commander of operations, said in a statement posted to Facebook.

Throughout the day, Iraq’s security media cell posted updates to Facebook, touting the discovery of tunnels used by the terrorists near Kirkuk, four “terrorist nests” with supplies in Salahuddin, and a weapons cache in Diyala with eight rocket launchers, 750 rounds of heavy machine-gun ammunition and other weapons.

U.S. forces continue to assist their Iraqi counterparts battling ISIS, but U.S. offensive strikes are rare and must meet stringent requirements, said Capt. Brad Bynum, an operations officer at Qayara Airfield West, where Americans staff an operations center that supports government forces with intelligence, reconnaissance and defensive airstrikes.

NDAA expands eligibility to receive full military honors

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

Former prisoners of war and enlisted Medal of Honor recipients are now eligible for burial with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery, according to a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act signed recently by President Donald Trump.

The bill’s passage capped a 20-month odyssey for Kanda Fletcher, whose father, former Korean War POW and Army Pfc. Robert Fletcher, was buried there but denied those honors after he died in February 2018.

Fletcher was so incensed that her father was not eligible for the same honors afforded some

troops with no combat experience that starting in April 2018 she campaigned to extend them to men like her father. Her work was highlighted by Stars and Stripes, which caught the eye of several congressmen, resulting in a bill introduced in February by Rep. Jimmy Panetta, D-Calif.

“It’s been a very emotional journey,” Fletcher said last week after unveiling the news to her family on Christmas.

The provision for extended military honors was folded into the annual defense authorization act a year after Rep. Mike Bishop, R-Mich., introduced a bill to correct what he perceived as a slight. Bishop lost reelection in 2018 but Panetta reintroduced the bill and it

made its way into the authorization act.

Trump signed the act Dec. 20.

“Full military honors ceremonies remind us of the service and valor demonstrated by those who have defended, protected, and sacrificed for freedom and democracy,” Panetta said in a statement Dec. 23 to Stars and Stripes. “I am humbled and honored to include my bipartisan legislation into the National Defense Authorization Act.”

Any former POW who served honorably and died on or after Nov. 30, 1993, can be buried at Arlington. Recipients of the Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Air Force Cross, the Navy Cross,

the Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star or the Purple Heart are also eligible for burial there.

In August 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs counted 5,017 former POWs living in the U.S. However, that number only includes POWs in the VA system.

The Congressional Medal of Honor Society counts 71 living Medal of Honor recipients of many ranks, according to the society website.

Commissioned and warrant officers and senior noncommissioned officers who are eligible for burial at Arlington may also receive “full honors,” which includes an additional escort, a marching element, a band and the horse-drawn caisson.

Suspect held in stabbing at rabbi's home

Associated Press

MONSEY, N.Y. — A man stabbed and wounded five people as they gathered at a rabbi's home north of New York City to celebrate Hanukkah, an attack that the governor said Sunday was fueled by intolerance and evidence of a "cancer" in American politics.

A suspect is in custody at the Ramapo Police headquarters and will face five counts of attempted murder and one count of burglary, according to Police Chief Brad Weidel. Police identified him as Grafton E. Thomas, 37, of Greenwood Lake, N.Y.

The Saturday night stabbings north of New York City on the

seventh night of Hanukkah come on the heels of a string of attacks targeting Jews in the region, including a massacre at a kosher grocery store in New Jersey earlier this month. The rabbi's home is in Monsey, a town not far from the New Jersey state line and one of several in the Hudson Valley that has seen an influx of Hasidic Jews in recent years. The Rockland County town is about 35 miles north of New York City.

One person was very seriously wounded and remained in critical condition, Gov. Andrew Cuomo told reporters. The rabbi's son was also injured, the governor said. His status and

that of the other victims were not clear.

Authorities have not provided a motive for the attack, but Cuomo said it was an example of larger problems.

"This is an intolerant time in our country," he said to reporters outside the rabbi's home on Sunday morning. "We see anger, we see hatred exploding.

"It is an American cancer on the body politic."

He said he thought the crime was an act of domestic terrorism.

Police said the stabbings happened around 10 p.m. A witness saw the suspect fleeing in a car

and alerted police to a license plate number, Weidel, the police chief in Ramapo, which covers Monsey, said. That allowed police to find his vehicle as he entered New York City, where police apprehended him.

The Orthodox Jewish Public Affairs Council for the Hudson Valley region tweeted reports that the stabbings took place at the house of a Hasidic rabbi during a Hanukkah celebration.

The large home on Forshay Road remained cordoned off with yellow crime scene tape early Sunday. According to public records, the home belongs to Rabbi Chaim Rottenberg, who leads the adjacent synagogue.

Hawaii helicopter tours probed after fatal crash

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Tour helicopter operations in Hawaii have come under increased scrutiny after a deadly crash last week, one of several recent accidents in the state, with a congressman calling the trips unsafe and lacking proper oversight.

There were no survivors of a Thursday tour helicopter crash that killed three minors and four adults, officials confirmed Saturday.

The helicopter that was set to tour the rugged Na Pali Coast, the picturesque and remote northern shoreline of Kauai that was featured in the film "Jurassic Park," crashed on a mountaintop Thursday.

The remains of six people were recovered Friday and the seventh is still missing. Kauai police confirmed there were no survivors based in part on the nature of the crash and impact damage, officials said in a statement. Recovery efforts were suspended Saturday afternoon.

There were six people from two different families and a pilot on the flight.

U.S. Rep. Ed Case, of Hawaii, cited fatal accidents over

the years, blaming the Federal Aviation Administration for not taking National Transportation Safety Board safety improvement efforts seriously and the industry for not regulating itself.

"Tour helicopter and small aircraft operations are not safe, and innocent lives are paying the price," said Case, a Democrat.

The FAA, however, said it conducts regular surveillance on all Hawaii air tour operators and ensures companies address any issues, agency spokesman Ian Gregor said in an email. He said the FAA does not have concerns about the industry statewide.

In a statement Saturday, police said the flight manifest listed the pilot as Paul Matero, 69, of Wailua, Hawaii. Two passengers were named as Amy Gannon, 47, and Jocelyn Gannon, 13, of Wisconsin.

The four other passengers, including two girls who were 10 and 13 years old, are believed to be from Switzerland, police said, but their identities have not yet been released.

Plane crash kills 5, including LSU coach's daughter-in-law

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A small plane en route to a college football playoff game crashed into a post office parking lot in Louisiana shortly after takeoff Saturday, killing five people, including a well-known sports reporter who was the daughter-in-law of one of the team's coaches.

The two-engine Piper Cheyenne crashed in the city of Lafayette about a mile from the regional airport where the flight began, Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Tony Molinaro said. Investigators from the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board were investigating, according to Molinaro and an NTSB statement on Twitter.

The plane was an eight-passenger aircraft, said Lafayette Fire Chief Robert Benoit. Six people were on board the plane, five of whom were killed, he said. The sixth, a 37-year-old man, was being treated at an area hospital along with two people who were in the post office.

Steven Ensminger Jr., son of the offensive coordinator for the Louisiana State University football team, said his wife, Car-

ley McCord, was on board the flight and died when it crashed. He said the plane was en route to the Peach Bowl playoff game in Atlanta between LSU and Oklahoma.

"I just don't feel like this is real," Ensminger told The Associated Press in an Instagram message.

Ensminger said he was unable to go to the game and was at work when the crash happened. He said his father, Steven Ensminger, called him just before the elder Ensminger got to the stadium. The coach had tears in his eyes when he appeared on the field at the start of the game Saturday afternoon, and LSU players embraced him with hugs.

"He's the MVP right now," LSU head coach Ed Orgeron said in an on-air halftime interview. LSU won 63-28.

The Lafayette Fire Department identified the other people who were killed as Ian E. Biggs, 51, the plane's pilot; Robert Vaughn Crisp II, 59; Gretchen D. Vincent, 51; and Michael Walker Vincent, 15. The injured passenger, Stephen Wade Berzas, was in critical condition, said department spokesman Alton Trahan.

Female NASA astronaut breaks record

dpa

NEW YORK — U.S. astronaut Christina Koch on Saturday broke the record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman, having spent 289 days in space, according to NASA.

Having arrived on the International Space Station on March 15, Koch eclipsed the record of 288 days set by re-

tired astronaut Peggy Whitson.

NASA congratulated Koch for “reaching new heights” in a tweet.

“It’s a wonderful thing for science,” Koch told news outlet CNN from aboard the ISS. “We see another aspect of how the human body is affected by microgravity for the long term, and that’s really important for our future spaceflight plan

going forward to the moon and to Mars.”

By the time she returns to Earth in February, her time in space will stand at 328 days, just 12 days shy of retired astronaut Scott Kelly’s U.S. single spaceflight record, set in 2016.

Most ISS missions last only around six months.

In October, Koch broke an-

other record by conducting the first all-female spacewalk outside of the ISS alongside astronaut Jessica Meir.

While onboard the 2-decades-old ISS, Koch participates in scientific research, station maintenance, outreach, visiting vehicle operations and spacewalks, according to NASA’s website.

Thai SEAL dies of infection contracted during cave rescue

New York Daily News

A Thai Navy SEAL who took part in rescuing a soccer team from a flooded cave last year has died due to a blood infection he contracted during the operation.

Petty Officer Beiret Bureerak’s death last week was confirmed by the Royal Thai Navy

on Friday, which noted his condition deteriorated despite treatment, according to Reuters. He battled the infection for about a year.

The rescue operation also resulted in the death of retired Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Saman Kunam.

At the time, local outlets re-

ported that the 38-year-old, who had just supplied oxygen tanks to a chamber in the Thuam Luang Nang Non cave complex, did not have enough oxygen for himself and died heading out of the caves — which People reports are located near the borders of Laos and Myanmar.

The 12 boys from the Wild

Boars Academy football team and their coach, Ekapol Chanthawong, 25, were stranded underground when the cave in Chiang Rai flooded on June 23, 2018. The boys were ages 11 to 16.

All 13 were saved, with the rescue effort coming to a close on July 10.

Sydney New Year’s fireworks to carry on amid wildfires

Associated Press

PERTH, Australia — Sydney’s iconic New Year’s Eve fireworks will go ahead despite the country’s wildfire crisis to show the world Australia’s resiliency, the prime minister said, while authorities on Sunday braced for conditions to deteriorate with high temperatures.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison also announced financial support for some volunteer firefighters in New South Wales, the state worst hit by wildfires ravaging the nation.

“The world looks at Sydney every single year and they look at our vibrancy, they look at our passion, they look at our success,” he said. “In the midst of the challenges that we face, subject to the safety considerations, I can think of no better time to express to the world just how optimistic and positive we are as a country.”

The City of Sydney Council gave the green light although

fire authorities warned that the fireworks could be canceled if catastrophic conditions are declared.

Morrison said that eligible volunteer firefighters will receive \$209 a day, up to \$4,190 in total, if called out to battle blazes for more than 10 days. The compensation focused on people who are self-employed or work for small and medium-size businesses.

“The early and prolonged nature of this fire season has made a call beyond what is typically made on our volunteer firefighters,” he said.

Morrison, who has been under pressure since taking a much-criticized family vacation to Hawaii during the wildfire crisis, announced last week that volunteer firefighters from the federal public sector will receive paid leave entitlements.

The opposition Labor party has been pressing the government to consider widespread compensation for volunteer firefighters.

“A lot of everyone’s stunned, a lot of time away from work,” said Sean Warren, a volunteer firefighter for about seven years. “A lot of people are using up their annual leave as well. A lot of people are just missing their families ... they’ve skipped Christmas with their families and their grandchildren. So yeah, it’s a wide extreme of sacrifice that people have been putting in.”

Morrison said the compensation was necessary so that the New South Wales fires commissioner is in a position to continue to call out the volunteer force.

The program is expected to cost \$34.9 million but will be uncapped with the first \$6.9 million being made available next month. Morrison said it would be offered to other states and territories requesting help.

Wildfires have also flared in Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia.

New South Wales, the country’s most populous state, has

received the brunt of the wildfire catastrophe, which has killed nine people nationwide and razed more than 1,000 homes in the past few months.

High temperatures in the country’s east are expected until the new year. Sydney’s western suburbs were set to hit 106 degrees Fahrenheit Sunday before peaking at 111 F on Tuesday.

Fire danger in Sydney and northern New South Wales is currently at very high.

New South Wales Rural Fire Services Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said 85 fires were still burning across the state with almost half of them not contained.

“We’ve got some deteriorating weather conditions over the coming days, particularly Monday and worsening through to Tuesday,” he said.

An emergency warning was issued Sunday for Victoria’s east as conditions worsen. Melbourne, the state’s capital, was set to reach 109 F on Monday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Staff thwarts bold attempt to steal coats

MA DANVERS — A group of thieves attempted to steal thousands of dollars worth of high-end Canada Goose jackets from a men's clothing store during a brazen, daylight heist that was thwarted by store employees and captured on surveillance video.

The Salem News reported a man and four women entered Giblees in Danvers around 11:30 a.m. Thursday and walked directly to the parkas near the back of the store. While one attempted to create a diversion, the others grabbed as many coats as they could and dashed for the door.

Employees attempted to block the door and tear the jackets away from the thieves, who dropped most of them as they jumped into a getaway car. Suspects were located a few hours later in Lynn, and an unknown number of jackets were recovered.

Man in 'I Believe' hat steals from tip jar

PA PHILADELPHIA — Police are looking for a thief who sported a hat that said "I Believe" as he swiped a tip jar stuffed with \$250 on Christmas Day.

Yalli Avitan said she at first thought an employee had moved the jar to empty it during the Christmas dinner rush at her family's Kosher takeout, the Judah Mediterranean Grill.

Surveillance video showed an unidentified man pretending to read a menu before walking out with the jar.

"When I realized what happened, I was hurt," Avitan told The Philadelphia Inquirer. "Especially on Christmas Day,

when people are putting in hours that they could be spending with their families."

Police dog treated for fentanyl exposure

RI SMITHFIELD — Smithfield Police said in a Facebook post that officers were executing a search warrant at a home on Dec. 20 when police dog Ajax began experiencing symptoms of fentanyl exposure.

A K-9 officer quickly administered the opioid overdose reversal drug Narcan and took Ajax to Ocean State Veterinary Specialists in East Greenwich.

Officials there gave the K-9 another dose of Narcan. Police said Ajax returned to work the next day.

The search was part of "Operation Mouse Trap," a monthslong investigation into drug trafficking in East Providence and Fall River, Mass.

Fights at 3 malls lead to arrests, 1 closure

CT HARTFORD — Fights broke out in three malls Thursday, leading to arrests, minor injuries and at least one temporary closure.

The Connecticut Post Mall in Milford was ordered closed around 6 p.m. Thursday after several fights broke out among teens around the mall's food court and spread throughout the mall.

Police at the mall became overwhelmed and requested help from state police and other area agencies. No arrests or injuries were reported but the mall on Friday imposed temporary restrictions for youths.

At Westfarms Mall in West Hartford, police quelled a large fight among youths, also around 6 p.m. They charged

one juvenile with interfering with an officer and disorderly conduct.

At the Westfield Trumbull Mall in Trumbull, police arrested seven people, including a 19-year-old man and six juveniles, after several fights broke out across the mall around 7 p.m. They were charged with breach of peace and disorderly conduct.

Salt-loving goats are killed in traffic

WY JACKSON — Dozens of salt-loving mountain goats are coming down from the slopes of western Wyoming to lick up the salt-and-sand mixture that snowplows spread over a highway, leading to collisions with vehicles traversing the icy canyon roadway.

At least three goats were hit and killed by motorists over a five-day span in October and November near the tip of the Snake River Canyon south of Jackson and near the Idaho state line, Wyoming Game and Fish wildlife biologist Gary Fralick told the Jackson Hole News & Guide.

The actual number of goats killed each year along U.S. Highways 26 and 89 could be a lot higher, he said.

Mother charged after son is hurt in washer

IN ELWOOD — A woman who told police in August that she found her 5-year-old son injured inside a running washing machine now faces a child neglect charge.

Madison County prosecutors recently charged Heather Oliver, 30, of Elwood with one felony count of neglect of a dependent resulting in bodily injury.

Police were dispatched on Aug. 16 to an Elwood hospital, where they met the boy's father. Nurses told officers the child had been in and out of consciousness and had multiple bruises on his upper body and scratches on his arms, according to court documents.

Oliver later told officers she had thought she saw her son, who has a form of autism, in bed when she went to get a glass of milk in the kitchen, but then heard the washing machine filling with water and went to investigate.

9 suspected of voting twice may be charged

IA DES MOINES — State officials have referred nine people to Iowa county attorneys, saying the nine voted twice in the November election last year.

The Iowa secretary of state's office said in a news release Friday that the nine are suspected of voting in Iowa after casting ballots in other states.

There were 27 suspected instances of people voting first in Iowa and then other states during the same election.

Police help deliver a Christmas baby

NH CONCORD — New Hampshire police helped deliver a baby on Interstate 93 early Christmas morning.

State police posted the news and a photo with the baby and parents at the hospital on social media Wednesday morning.

State police Sgt. Vincent Grieco and Trooper Ryan St. Cyr and Boscawen Police Officer Ryan Nolan helped welcome baby Dominic into the world in Concord shortly after midnight.

From wire reports

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Burrow throws 7 TD passes as LSU rolls

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Joe Burrow and the LSU Tigers turned in a first half for the ages, a breathtaking offensive display even as their coordinator grieved a horrific tragedy from his box high above the field.

This team from the bayou is truly something special.

With one more victory, it will be a national champion.

In his first game as a Heisman Trophy winner, Burrow threw for seven touchdowns and 493 yards as No. 1 LSU romped to a stunning 63-28 victory over No. 4 Oklahoma in the Peach Bowl semifinal game Saturday.

The Tigers (14-0) are headed to the title game against No. 3 Clemson — a 29-23 winner over No. 2 Ohio State in the second semifinal — clicking on all cylinders, having dismantled the Sooners (12-2) with a 30-minute outburst that will long be remembered in Cajun country.

“We go into every game thinking nobody can stop us,” Burrow said.

Certainly, the Sooners couldn’t.

Burrow tied the record for a college bowl game with his seven TD passes — which all came before the bands hit the

field for the halftime show. Justin Jefferson was on the receiving end for four of those scoring plays, also tying a bowl record.

As if that wasn’t enough, Burrow scored an eighth TD on a 3-yard run in the third quarter, thoroughly dominating his expected duel with Oklahoma quarterback Jalen Hurts, the Heisman runner-up.

Yet, the postgame celebration was weighed down by heavy hearts.

LSU offensive coordinator Steve Ensminger learned shortly before kickoff that his daughter-in-law, broadcaster Carley McCord, was among five people killed in a plane crash in Louisiana. The small plane went down shortly after takeoff for what was supposed to be a flight to Atlanta for the game.

Head coach Ed Orgeron delivered the news to Ensminger.

“Coach, we’re going to get through this,” Ensminger told his boss.

Then the coordinator headed to his usual spot in the box, calling plays alongside passing game coordinator Joe Brady.

It was a brilliant, poignant performance in the face of such grief. The players didn’t learn until afterward what Ensminger was going through.

“I can’t think of what he was

able to do today with the circumstances,” Brady said. “It speaks to the type of man he is.”

LSU needed only three plays to race 42 yards for its first score — a perfectly thrown ball over Jefferson’s shoulder for a 19-yard TD less than 3 minutes into the game.

Oklahoma briefly put up a fight. Hurts’ 51-yard pass to CeeDee Lamb set up a 3-yard touchdown run by Kennedy Brooks that tied the score at 7.

After that, the rout was on.

It was 49-14 by halftime.

Jefferson hauled in a 35-yard pass for touchdown No. 2. Then a 42-yarder for No. 3. And, finally, a 30-yard scoring strike that left him counting off four fingers for the crowd — all before the midway point of the second quarter.

Terrace Marshall Jr. contributed to the onslaught with TD catches of 8 and 2 yards. Tight end Thaddeus Moss — the son of NFL Hall of Fame receiver Randy Moss — made his daddy proud by getting free behind the secondary, hauling in a pass and shoving off a fast-closing defender to complete the 62-yard scoring play.

“One team, one heartbeat,” Orgeron said.

It was a miserable finale for Hurts, who closed out a nomadic

college career that began with him leading Alabama to two national championship games before losing his starting job to Tua Tagovailoa. After graduating, Hurts transferred to Oklahoma for a one-and-done season that produced some dazzling numbers but ended short of the ultimate goal.

Running for his life most of the game, Hurts was largely stymied on the ground and through the air. He ran for two touchdowns but gained just 43 yards with his legs. He was held to 15-for-31 for 217 yards passing, giving up a brilliant, leaping interception to Kary Vincent Jr. that quickly brought the LSU offense back on the field as the Tigers were blowing the game open.

“We needed to take advantage of every opportunity we had against a team like this,” Hurts said. “We failed to do that.”

The Tigers will head back to Louisiana for a de facto home game at the Superdome on Jan. 13. That mirrors their last title run during the 2007 season, when they beat Ohio State 38-24 in New Orleans for the BCS championship. “Just getting there is not our final destination,” Orgeron said. “We’re looking to win it.”

Irish rout Cyclones in Camping World Bowl

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — So much for the notion that No. 14 Notre Dame didn’t have anything to play for in the Camping World Bowl.

A year removed from an appearance in the CFP national semifinals, the Fighting Irish closed out another double-digit win season with arguably their best all-around performance in a 33-9 victory over Iowa State on Saturday.

“I’m just so proud of our football team. 2019 will be one that I’ll always remember, for a group of guys that just loved to play the game. They had such a strong brotherhood,” coach

Brian Kelly said.

“They did not listen to what the naysayers had to say about them. The negative tone, the negative people out there. All they cared about was playing the game,” Kelly added. “It was clean. It was about competing. Always looking to better themselves.”

Ian Book threw for 247 yards and a touchdown, Tony Jones Jr. scored on an 84-yard run and game MVP Chase Claypool had seven receptions for 146 yards and a TD for the Irish (11-2, No. 15 CFP), who finished on a six-game winning streak after losing to Michigan to tumble out of contention for a playoff berth in late October.

Notre Dame also lost to Georgia in September; however, Kelly said the team remained focused and continued to focus and get better.

“Even this week. ‘Notre Dame is not ready to play.’ They used that as another form of motivation to show people wrong. They just read this team wrong,” Kelly said. “It’s just so satisfying that this group has been rewarded with 11 wins. ... They overcame adversity, lived the life lessons of it. They’re not perfect. They never pretended to be perfect and never wanted to be, but always strived for excellence.”

Book completed 20 of 28 passes without an interception,

including a 27-yard TD throw to Claypool, who went over 1,000 yards receiving for the season and also recovered a fumble on special teams to set up an early field goal.

The Cyclones (7-6) lost to four ranked teams — Iowa, Oklahoma, Baylor and Oklahoma State — by a combined 11 points this season and was hoping to end its fourth season under Matt Campbell with a signature win for a once-downtrodden program.

Brock Purdy was 17-for-30 for 222 yards and no interceptions for Iowa State, but he was unable to get his team into the end zone.

Clemson rallies for Fiesta Bowl win

Associated Press

GLENDAL, Ariz. — Blaring from the Clemson locker room after yet another playoff victory was Aretha Franklin's classic "Respect."

The Tigers have won two of the past three national championships and become college football's gold-standard program, yet still often feel overlooked. Doubtful. Disrespected.

Sure, Clemson ran roughshod through the Atlantic Coast Conference. But was it too easy?

Facing a serious challenger for the first time in months, No. 3 Clemson had to tap into its championship DNA to advance to the College Football Playoff title game for the fourth time in five years.

Trevor Lawrence connected with Travis Etienne on a 34-yard, go-ahead touchdown with 1:49 left in the fourth quarter, capping a 94-yard march, and the defending national champions beat No. 2 Ohio State 29-23 Saturday night in the Fiesta Bowl.

"We finish," said Clemson coach Dabo Swinney, whose Tigers are 100-2 when leading going into the fourth quarter since 2011. "That's not just who we are. That's what we do."

The Tigers (14-0) will play No. 1 LSU on Jan. 13 in New Orleans, looking for their third national title in the past four seasons.

Clemson played only one close game this season, a one-pointer way back in September against North Carolina. Otherwise, the Tigers rarely needed to play a starter in

the fourth quarter.

"Everybody kept saying we didn't play nobody, that we blow out teams. Tonight showed what we can do," Clemson receiver Tee Higgins said. "We showed everybody we got fight in us."

Ohio State (13-1) proved to be every bit Clemson's match, although the Buckeyes walked away frustrated by several close officiating calls. Especially two video reviews that could have gone either way and did not go theirs.

"One play can alter the game," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "It didn't seem like we got any of those plays."

The Buckeyes had their 19-game winning streak snapped, losing for the first time under Day.

Ohio State jumped out to a 16-0 lead in the first half and then responded to a Clemson rally to retake the lead, 23-21 in the fourth quarter.

The Tigers got the ball down two at their own 6 with 3:07 left in the fourth quarter. Lawrence, after being up and down for much of the night, suddenly found the Golden Boy form that he used to lead Clemson to a national title as a freshman last year.

The Tigers needed four plays and 1:18, with Lawrence completing all three of his passes and mixing in an 11-yard run. The sophomore quarterback who has never lost a college start passed for 259 yards and two scores and ran for a career-high 107 yards, including a 67-yard touchdown late in the first half.

"Just the fight of this team. Didn't play

great. Didn't look pretty, but just finding a way to get it done," Lawrence said.

Lawrence added a two-point conversion pass to Higgins, but left plenty of time for Ohio State and Justin Fields to respond. The Buckeyes drove to the Clemson 23, but on second-and-7, Fields fired to the end zone and his pass was intercepted by Nolan Turner with 37 seconds left. Ohio State receiver Chris Olave had broken off his route thinking Fields was going to scramble.

"That ball was supposed to go to me and I was supposed to run a post and I believe it would have been a touchdown. Definitely put it on me," Olave said.

The pick secured Clemson's 29th consecutive victory and the Tigers improved to 6-2 in playoff games.

"I told Ryan, that Ohio State team, what an unbelievable game, their quarterback, their back, those guys played their hearts out," Swinney said. "But in the end, our guys showed what they're made of. They've got the heart of a champion, they've got the eye of a tiger."

Ohio State went into the fourth quarter trailing 21-16, and with everything seemingly going Clemson's way. Buckeyes star J.K. Dobbins ran for 174 yards, including two 60-plus yarders in the first half, but was slowed by a twisted left ankle late in the second quarter.

Fields heated up and orchestrated an 84-yard drive, capped by a fourth-and-short, 23-yard touchdown pass to Olave to make it 23-21 with 11:46 left in the fourth.

Penn State's defense does in Memphis in Cotton Bowl

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — All-America linebacker Micah Parsons led the big blitz for Penn State, and he had Brady White all wrapped up when the Memphis quarterback suddenly flipped away the ball — right into the hands of Garrett Taylor.

On a day when the Nittany Lions' defense gave up its most points and yards all season, Taylor turned that gift into a 15-yard interception return for a touchdown in a 53-39 victory over the Group of Five Tigers on Saturday in the highest-scoring Cotton Bowl ever.

"A huge momentum shift," Taylor said.

Journey Brown ran for 202 yards with two long touchdowns, but the Parsons-created pick-six came three plays after Brown was stopped short on a fourth-and-1. Taylor put the No. 13 Nittany Lions (11-2, No. 10 CFP) up 45-36 going into the fourth quarter of the 84th Cotton Bowl.

"For our defense to come back and what you probably consider a sudden-change situation, and be able to get that play, I think it was a huge momentum play," coach James Franklin said.

Said Parsons: "The game was going back and forth, and I thought the team who had a defensive turnover would win, and we got one when we

needed."

Brown was the offensive MVP and Parsons, with 14 tackles and two sacks, was the game's top defensive player. Both had gone back and forth about that possibility during practice this week.

"We go against him all the time ... nobody prepares and prepares for those opportunities and those moments more than this guy does," Brown said of Parsons, who was sitting right by him.

American Athletic Conference champion and No. 15 Memphis (12-2, No. 17 CFP) played its first game under coach Ryan Silverfield. The offensive line coach was promoted when Mike Norvell left after

four seasons to become Florida State's coach this month.

"It just didn't end the way we wanted to," Silverfield said. "I have to do a better job as a head coach to make sure all three phases are prepared."

White was 32-for-51 passing for 454 yards with two interceptions. He had a rushing touchdown, as did Patrick Taylor Jr. and Kenneth Gainwell. The rest of the Tigers' points came on a Cotton Bowl-record six field goals by Riley Patterson.

The Tigers finished with 542 total yards. But White was sacked a season-high six times and didn't throw a touchdown for the first time since the season opener.

Kentucky outlasts Louisville in OT

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Nick Richards did whatever heavy lifting No. 19 Kentucky needed against rival Louisville, intensity that put him on the brink of fouling out.

He eventually harnessed his energy into clutch contributions on both ends of the floor and celebrated big stops in the Wildcats' much-needed victory by punching the air.

Richards had 13 points, including seven in a row in overtime, and Kentucky scored the final eight points for a 78-70 victory over No. 3 Louisville on Saturday in a thrilling Bluegrass rivalry showdown.

Louisville led 68-65 on Jordan Nwora's three-pointer with 2:20 left before Richards converted a three-point play and added a layup to make it 70-68 with 1:23 remaining. The junior forward added two more foul shots for a 72-70 lead before Immanuel Quickley and Tyrese Maxey provided a six-point cushion from the line. Ashton Hagans' dunk with 4.9 seconds left sealed the tense win for the Wildcats (9-3) before 20,437 at Rupp Arena.

"I just played smarter," said Richards, who also had 10 rebounds, a block and took a couple of charges in the extra session. "I noticed that when they were driving on me they were lowering their shoulders on me, so I just tried to take charges on those. I was really happy that they called those charges. If he (the official) had called a block, I don't know what would have happened."

While Richards provided the post presence, Maxey helped out with big baskets. The freshman guard's free throws capped a career-best 27-point performance that topped his previous high by one in his collegiate debut against top-ranked Michigan State. For a while he seemed destined for all the praise with clutch shots during a back-and-forth second half before his

teammate picked up the load in the extra session.

"I was just saying, 'We're good,'" said Maxey, who made nine of 14 shots with four three-pointers. "Trailing by three points with two minutes left, we had a lot of time and lot of possessions. We just had to get stops."

The overtime was the first in a regular-season game between the schools and the first since Louisville won 80-68 on March 26, 1983 in the NCAA Tournament.

The Wildcats ended a two-game losing streak in which Utah and Ohio State both shot 50% or better against them in Las Vegas. Quickley had 18 points for Kentucky, which shot 46% for its 11th win over Louisville in 13 meetings.

Steven Enoch had 18 points and Dwayne Sutton 10 for the Cardinals (11-2). Louisville shot just 40% and made just three of nine in overtime.

Doncic's triple powers Mavericks past Warriors

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Luka Doncic notched his ninth triple-double of the season and didn't even play the fourth quarter.

Doncic had 31 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds in just 30 minutes, and the Dallas Mavericks routed the Golden State Warriors 141-121 on Saturday night.

"I didn't expect they were going to trap me in the half court," Doncic said. "If they trap me, they have to play four-on-three basketball, which is easy. It's not just one player on the court — we have five — and if they trap me, I'm glad. We're going to hit those open shots. That's easy basketball for us."

Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 25 points, Kristaps Porzingis had 18 and Seth Curry added 17 off the bench for the Mavericks, who snapped the Warriors' four-game winning streak.

D'Angelo Russell had 30 points and eight three-pointers in the first half but injured his neck after falling and colliding with Dwight Powell during the

third quarter.

"Thank God it wasn't anything too serious," Russell said. "Just a little shoulder contusion. The contact kind of knocked the wind out of me, but I'm good now."

Russell returned for the start of the fourth but the Warriors were down by 19 at that point. He finished with 35 points and six assists.

"I want to talk about Russell," Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle said, "because I have never seen a guy score 12 points in two minutes to start the game. Right off the bat, he was on pace for 288 points. The shots he was throwing in were amazing. We kept trying to figure out ways to take him out of rhythm. In the first half, it was virtually impossible. Second half, we got a little more traction."

The Mavericks pulled away when Russell was out, outscoring the Warriors 45-24 in the third quarter. Hardaway made a deep three with 6:55 left in the third to give the Mavericks an eight-point lead that would only grow as the game went on.

Rangers' DeAngelo scores in OT to end Leafs' streak

Associated Press

TORONTO — The New York Rangers were confident they would get scoring chances against Toronto, and they made the most of the them.

Tony DeAngelo scored 51 seconds into overtime and the New York Rangers beat the Maple Leafs 5-4 on Saturday night, snapping Toronto's win streak at six games.

Ryan Strome had two goals and two assists for the Rangers (19-15-4). Artemi Panarin picked up his third assist of the night when he set up DeAngelo's winner in the first minute of the extra period.

"It feels good to get the win. It would have stung a little bit to not get the two points, but it feels good," Strome said.

Brett Howden and Mika Zibanejad also scored for New York.

"I think they tilted the ice a little more than we'd like in the third," Rangers forward Chris Kreider said. "They got very aggressive. I thought we did a good job of protecting the middle for the most part. Guys

were blocking shots, doing the right things, getting pucks out on changes. We weathered the storm there and then obviously a big play in overtime.

"There was a buy-in tonight. Guys not necessarily felt their best after the schedule the way it was. It's never an excuse. Every team is dealing with their own stuff. For us to come in here on the road against a very good team, in a very hard building to play in, and come out with two points is big for us."

Alexandar Georgiev stopped 44 shots.

"It's a good challenge," Georgiev said. "Winning is always fun; I'm glad for that."

The Maple Leafs entered the game 2-5-1 in the second game of back-to-back outings.

Auston Matthews scored twice to push Toronto (21-14-5) into overtime. William Nylander and Pierre Engvall also scored. The Maple Leafs found out before the game that they lost defenseman Jake Muzzin, the only Stanley Cup winner on their roster, with a broken foot.