

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Iran-backed militia vows revenge

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An Iran-backed Iraqi militia vowed Monday to retaliate for U.S. military strikes in Iraq and Syria that killed 25 of its fighters and wounded dozens, raising concerns of new attacks that could threaten American interests in the region.

The U.S. attack — the largest targeting an Iraqi state-sanctioned militia in recent years — and the calls for retaliation represent an escalation in the proxy war between the U.S. and Iran playing out in the Middle East.

The Iraqi government said it will reconsider its relationship with the U.S.-led coalition — the first time it has said it will do so since an agreement was struck to keep some U.S. troops in the country. It called the attack a “flagrant violation” of its sovereignty.

The U.S. military carried out the strikes Sunday against the Iran-backed Kataeb Hezbollah militia, calling it retaliation for last week’s killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that it blamed on the group.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the

strikes send the message that the U.S. will not tolerate actions by Iran that jeopardize American lives.

The U.S. military said “precision defensive strikes” were conducted against five sites of Kataeb Hezbollah, or Hezbollah Brigades, in Iraq and Syria.

The group, which is a separate force from the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, operates under the umbrella of the state-sanctioned militias known collectively as the Popular Mobilization Forces. Many of them are supported by Iran.

“Our battle with America and its mercenaries is now open to all possibilities,” Kataeb Hezbollah said in a statement around midnight Sunday. “We have no alternative today other than confrontation and there is nothing that will prevent us from responding to this crime.”

The Iraqi government condemned the U.S. attack, calling it a “dangerous violation of the rules of engagement that govern the work of U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq” by taking unilateral military action without the approval of Iraqi authorities.

In a strongly worded statement, it said

the attack targeted Iraqi forces operating in an area on the front lines of the war against Islamic State and fighters who played an instrumental role in defeating the extremists in eastern Syria and western Iraq.

The U.S. blames the Kataeb Hezbollah militia for a rocket barrage Friday that killed a U.S. defense contractor at a military compound near Kirkuk, in northern Iraq, as well as for a series of other attacks on bases that house American troops in Iraq that have not been claimed by any faction.

A spokesman for Kataeb Hezbollah denied that the group was behind the rocket attacks on U.S. bases, including the one that killed the American contractor, saying Washington is using them as a pretext to attack his group.

The spokesman, Mohammed Mohieh, told The Associated Press the death toll from the American airstrikes rose to 25 on Monday and that at least 51 militiamen were wounded, some of whom were in serious condition. The militia would retaliate, he said but added that the group’s commanders would decide on the form of retaliation.

3 suits filed in San Diego over housing conditions

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

Three lawsuits have been filed in San Diego against Lincoln Military Housing after the private military housing company’s September loss against a Marine Corps family who sued for negligence related to moldy conditions in their home.

Lenden Webb, attorney for two of the three lawsuits filed in San Diego Superior Court, said there’s “strength in numbers” when going against a large private company such as Lincoln, which manages more than 31,000 military housing units nationwide.

A representative for Lincoln declined to comment on the lawsuits.

The two Marine Corps families Webb represents are suing Lincoln for negligence, fraud and rent abatement, among other allegations, related to mold in housing at Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar that left members in each family sick.

The lawsuit complaint for the Clover family, filed Nov. 22, outlines the deterioration of their now 8-year-old son’s health over five years in base housing as well as the family’s continued requests for repairs related to water damage and leaks.

Jason Clover, an active-duty Marine; his wife, Valerie; and their two children lived at Camp Pendleton for about five years beginning in June 2014, according to court documents.

They discovered mold in the windowsills when they moved in. Within a month the kitchen sink began leaking — an issue that plagued their entire stay at the home.

A second family filed a lawsuit with Webb but chose to remain anonymous. The complaint, filed Dec. 10, outlines the problems faced by an active-duty Marine stationed at Miramar, his wife and their two children during a 10-month stay in base housing.

Both lawsuits are similar to the allegations in the case of the Charvat family, in which a San Diego jury ruled in the family’s favor and awarded \$2 million in damages. However, a judge this month ruled the money excessive and ordered a new

trial to determine the appropriate amount the family of four should be awarded.

A third lawsuit against Lincoln in the San Diego area was filed on Sept. 19 by Jason Beck, a warrant officer in the Marine Corps; his wife, Kali; and their three children for housing at Twentynine Palms. The family moved into base housing in August 2014 and is seeking damages for negligence, breach of contract, nuisance and retaliatory eviction, according to court documents.

The lawsuit doesn’t describe mold in the home but outlines excessive moisture and condensation, dust mites, water leaks and damp ceilings, as well as failure to maintain the property.

Kim calls for measures to protect N. Korea

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for his military and diplomats to prepare unspecified “offensive measures” to protect the country’s security and sovereignty, the North’s state media said Monday, before his end-of-year deadline for the Trump administration to make major concessions to salvage a fragile nuclear diplomacy.

Kim, during a ruling Workers’ Party meeting Sunday, also “comprehensively and anatomically analyzed” problems arising in efforts to rebuild the North’s moribund economy and presented tasks for “urgently

correcting the grave situation of the major industrial sectors,” the Korean Central News Agency said.

The plenary meeting of the party’s Central Committee, which began Saturday, is being closely watched amid concerns that Kim could suspend his deadlocked nuclear negotiations with the United States and take a more confrontational approach by lifting a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests.

The North has said the meeting, which was to continue for at least another day, is intended for discussions on overcoming “manifold and harsh trials and

difficulties.”

Kim, who has said the North would pursue a “new path” if Washington persists with sanctions and pressure, is expected to announce major policy changes during his New Year’s address on Wednesday.

The KCNA report did not describe any decisions made at the meeting or mention any specific remarks by Kim about the United States.

KCNA’s Korean-language report said Kim called for “active and offensive” measures.

Kim also “comprehensively and anatomically analyzed the problems arising in the overall state-building including the

state management and economic construction in the present time,” the agency said.

“He stressed the need to reasonably straighten the country’s economic work system and order and establish a strong discipline and presented the tasks for urgently correcting the grave situation of the major industrial sectors of the national economy,” the report said.

Lee Sang-min, a spokesman of South Korea’s Unification Ministry, said Seoul is closely watching the North Korean party meeting, but he didn’t speculate on what Kim’s call for active and offensive security measures would have meant.

Taliban targets Afghan security forces, killing 14

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban targeted a pro-government militia compound in northern Afghanistan before dawn Monday, killing 14 members of the Afghan security forces, a local official said. The Taliban quickly claimed responsibility for the attack.

The attack came even as Taliban officials told The Associated Press just hours earlier that a temporary, nationwide ceasefire has been agreed upon among their council leaders. It wasn’t clear when the ceasefire would go into effect.

Of the 14 fatalities in the predawn attack in Jawzjan province, 13 were members of a pro-government militia and one was a policeman, said Abdul Maroof Azer, the governor’s spokesman.

Five other militiamen were wounded and two are missing, according to Azer. He said reinforcements later managed to reach the area and that the compound is now firmly back under government control.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military

in its daily report of overnight military operations with Afghan forces said that 30 Taliban fighters were killed across the country and several other insurgents detained.

The Taliban have intensified their attacks in northern Afghanistan in recent days. They targeted a local militiamen compound in northern Takhar province on Sunday, killing at least 17 Afghan militiamen. On Friday, at least 10 Afghan soldiers were killed in an attack on a checkpoint in southern Helmand province.

On Dec. 23, an American soldier was killed in combat in northern Kunduz province. The Taliban claimed they were behind a fatal roadside bombing that targeted American and Afghan forces there. Also last week, a Taliban attack on a checkpoint killed at least seven Afghan army soldiers in northern Balkh province. Another six Afghan troops were killed in the same province Thursday in an attack on an army base.

Somalia ends year with record number of strikes

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. military conducted three airstrikes Sunday in Somalia, where a record 63 such attacks were conducted in 2019 as part of a stepped-up campaign against Islamic militants.

The latest bombings hit terrorists in two separate locations in Somalia, killing four fighters and destroying two vehicles, U.S. Africa Command said in a statement.

The majority of U.S. military strikes in Somalia have been directed at the al-Shabab terrorist group, which is aligned with al-Qaida and seeks to overthrow the country’s U.S.-backed central government.

“They (al-Shabab) are a global menace and their sights are set on exporting violence regionally and eventually attacking the U.S. homeland,” Maj. Gen. William Gayler, AFRICOM’s director of operations, said in a statement.

The number of strikes this year far outpaces that of previous years in Somalia, where the U.S. military conducted 47 aerial attacks in 2018 and 35 in 2017.

As the pace of attacks has picked up, so has outside scrutiny of military operations in the country.

Earlier this year, international human rights organization Amnesty International issued reports that accused AFRICOM of killing about 20 civilians in multiple strikes conducted between April 2017 and March 2019.

AFRICOM disputed the group’s methodology and findings. To date, the command has acknowledged only two civilian casualties from an airstrike in 2018. That acknowledgement came after an internal review of airstrikes found a U.S. counterterrorism unit failed to properly report the deaths to higher headquarters.

The review was prompted in part by continued interest in civilian deaths by both Amnesty and Congress.

Washington has increased its support for Somalia, with a strengthened diplomatic mission and a military training effort focused on building up the country’s military. U.S. special operations troops also serve as advisers to Somali forces.

Gunman killed by Texas church congregants

Associated Press

WHITE SETTLEMENT, Texas — A gunman who killed two people during a Texas church service was fatally shot within seconds by armed congregants, said state officials, who hailed the state's gun laws that allow weapons in places of worship.

More than 240 people were in the West Freeway Church of Christ in the Fort Worth-area town of White Settlement during Sunday's shooting, authorities said.

Isabel Arreola told the Star-Telegram that she sat near the gunman and that she'd never seen him before Sunday's service. She said he appeared to be wearing a disguise, perhaps a fake beard, and that he made her uncomfortable.

She said the man stood up, pulled a shotgun from his clothing, opened fire and was quickly shot by two congregants who were part of a volunteer security team.

"I was so surprised because I did not know that so many in the church were armed," she said.

Tiffany Wallace told Dallas TV station KXAS that her father, Anton "Tony" Wallace, was one of the people killed. She said her father was a deacon at the church and had just handed out communion when the gunman approached him.

"I ran toward my dad and the last thing I remember is him asking for oxygen and I was just holding him, telling him I loved him and that he was going to make it," Wallace said.

Wallace said her father was rushed to a

hospital but he did not survive.

At a news conference Sunday night, Texas Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said the gunman was killed within six seconds of opening fire. Patrick hailed the state's gun laws, including a measure enacted this year that affirmed the right of licensed handgun holders to carry a weapon in places of worship unless the facility bans them.

That law was passed in the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting in Texas history, which was also at a church. In the 2017 massacre at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, a man who opened fire on a Sunday morning congregation killed more than two dozen people. He later killed himself.

Military in Europe to see higher rent

BY JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Americans assigned to Air Force bases in Europe could soon be paying higher rent for off-base homes after revised Pentagon rules removed the ceiling on what landlords can charge tenants.

Housing offices will still vet homes for safety and help mediate disputes between landlords and tenants, but landlords are free to set their own prices within the parameters of German law, officials said.

"We expect to see those rates go up," said Lt. Col. Kathryn M. Kilker, 86th Civil Engineer Squadron commander.

The change went into effect last month after new guidance was issued to wing commanders across U.S. Air Forces in Europe-Air Forces Africa.

The revised rules apply across the Defense Department, officials in Germany said, but thus far no changes have been announced elsewhere.

The rules shouldn't affect leases stateside, where housing offices don't typically get involved in validating rent.

In the Kaiserslautern area, where a majority of the roughly 50,000 Americans tied to the military community live

off base, the new guidance is already boosting new lease prices.

"We're seeing a steady amount of people increasing the rental rate for new contracts," Kilker said.

Current tenants won't be immediately affected because German law prohibits landlords from raising the rent on contracts during the first 15 months of a lease, Kilker said.

Previously, housing officials could refuse to list a property if they thought the rent was too high, Kilker and another official at Ramstein said.

Military personnel and most civilians assigned overseas receive a housing allowance from the U.S. government to cover rent and utilities based on rank or grade, family size and the local cost of living.

Unlike in the U.S., service members overseas cannot keep any extra allowance that they don't use.

With the new rules, junior enlisted personnel might have to look for rental homes farther away from bases in order to keep their rent and utilities within their housing allowance, officials said.

Not everyone needs to go through the housing office to find a rental property.

Military personnel and Air Force civilians in Kaiserslautern must get the housing office to approve their lease, but Army civilians, Defense Department teachers and contractors do not.

However, the amount they are reimbursed for rent and utilities is limited by the housing allowance rules. The revised rule could encourage more landlords to list their properties with the housing office, said Scott Vincent, of the Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center, Detachment 4, at Ramstein.

"The housing office won't set their rate, which I think is what most of them were probably concerned about," he said.

Driving the change is the removal from the Joint Travel Regulations last spring of language that said military housing offices could "refuse to approve a lease" if the rental amount was "excessive and not reflective of available housing," Vincent said.

The new rule should apply to all military housing offices that vet rental rates, Vincent said.

Stars and Stripes reporters Kent Harris in Aviano and Matthew Keeler in Osan contributed to this story.

Rep. Lewis says cancer is latest battle

Associated Press

ATLANTA — As a civil rights activist at 25, John Lewis was beaten so badly his skull was fractured and the TV images from an Alabama bridge in the 1960s forced a nation's awakening to racial discrimination. As a congressman today at 79, Lewis is facing a foe like none before: advanced pancreatic cancer.

The veteran Democrat congressman from Georgia has fought many struggles in his lifetime. Yet, he said, "I have never faced a fight quite like the one I have now," announcing Sunday in Washington that the cancer was detected earlier this month and confirmed in a diagnosis.

Lewis has had many battles, and this he views as one more dawning. He was arrested at least 40 times in the civil rights era, several more times as a congressman since being elected in 1986.

The youngest and last survivor of the Big Six civil rights activists, a group once led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Lewis made clear that he has no plans to step aside from power while he undergoes treatment.

Pompeo aims to affirm support in Ukraine

Bloomberg

U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo arrives in Ukraine this week to voice support for the embattled nation, a message muddled by Rudy Giuliani's latest visit there in search of dirt on Joe Biden and by the pending Senate impeachment trial of President Donald Trump.

Pompeo will "reaffirm U.S. support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity" when he visits Friday, the State Department said in announcing travels that will also take him to Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Cyprus.

But even as the top U.S. diplomat, Pompeo may struggle to convince his counterparts

in Kyiv that he really runs America's Ukraine policy after he acquiesced to demands from Giuliani — and Trump — including the purging of an ambassador who resisted efforts to pressure Ukraine's new president.

Hundreds of hours of debate and testimony in the impeachment saga haven't clarified U.S. policy toward Ukraine. Senior officials in Kyiv may have reason to question whether the Trump administration sees their nation primarily as a fledgling democracy and bulwark against Russian aggression or just a pawn in a political effort to attack Democrats ahead of the 2020 election.

Pompeo and other officials say Ukraine — which has been

in conflict with Russia since it invaded Crimea in 2014 — is a national security priority and point to the delivery of almost \$400 million in aid as proof. But critics say the actions of Trump and his personal lawyer outside normal diplomatic channels, including holding up that aid for months, suggest all they cared about was obtaining political dirt.

"The idea that this administration has prioritized or dealt effectively with the Ukraine crisis is a political fiction," said Andrew Weiss, a vice president at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Pompeo will have to navigate the divide between official and unofficial U.S. policy without upsetting Trump or providing

more fodder to the president's critics. He ensured his visit would be a little less awkward by relieving acting Ambassador William Taylor — his hand-picked envoy who provided damaging criticism during the impeachment inquiry — of duty effective Jan. 1, a few days before Taylor says he was scheduled to come home anyway.

Zelenskiy's administration — which still covets a White House meeting that Trump has withheld — made it clear it welcomes Pompeo's visit.

"The U.S. is our strategic partner and we are very grateful for its bipartisan support in all sectors," Iuliia Mendel, Zelenskiy's spokeswoman, said in a phone interview. "We hope we will expand our cooperation."

Law strengthens Californians' digital data privacy rights

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Forty million Californians will soon obtain sweeping digital privacy rights stronger than any seen before in the U.S. — rights that could pose a significant challenge to Big Tech and the data economy it created.

So long as state residents don't mind shouldering much of the burden of exercising them, that is.

Come Wednesday, roughly one in 10 Americans will gain the power to review personal information collected by large

companies around the world, from purchase histories and location tracking to compiled "profiles" that slot people into categories such as religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Starting Jan. 1, they can also force these companies — including banks, retailers and, of course, tech companies — to stop selling that information or even to delete it in bulk.

The law defines data sales so broadly that it covers almost any information sharing that benefits companies, including data transfers between corporate affiliates and to third party "data brokers" — middlemen

who trade in personal information.

And because it applies to any company that meets a threshold for interacting with state residents, the California law might end up serving as a de facto national standard. Early signs of compliance have already started cropping up in the form of "Don't sell my personal information" links at the bottom of many corporate websites.

"If we do this right in California," said California attorney general Xavier Becerra, the state will "put the capital P back into privacy for all Americans."

China convicts researchers involved in gene-edited babies

Associated Press

BEIJING — A Chinese scientist who set off an ethical debate with claims that he had made the world's first genetically edited babies was sentenced Monday to three years in prison because of his research, state media said.

He Jiankui, who was convicted of practicing medicine without a license, was also fined \$430,000 by a court in the southern city of Shenzhen, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported. Two other researchers involved in the project received lesser sentences and fines.

The verdict said the three defendants

had not obtained qualification as doctors, pursued fame and profits, deliberately violated Chinese regulations on scientific research and crossed an ethical line in both scientific research and medicine, according to Xinhua. It also said they had fabricated ethical review documents.

The court said the researchers were involved in the births of three gene-edited babies to two women, confirming reports of a third baby. It said all three pleaded guilty during the trial, which Xinhua reported was closed to the public because of privacy concerns.

He, the lead researcher, shocked the scientific world when he announced in

November 2018 that he had altered the embryos of twin girls who had been born the same month. He described his work in exclusive interviews with The Associated Press.

The announcement sparked a global debate over the ethics of gene editing.

The verdict accused him of colluding with Zhang Renli and Qin Jinzhou, who worked at medical institutes in the same province.

Zhang was sentenced to two years in prison and fined 1 million yuan, Xinhua said. Qin received an 18-month prison sentence, but with a two-year reprieve, and a \$71,500 fine.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mysterious drones seen over 2 states

CO DENVER — Authorities have confirmed reports of drone sightings in three more counties in north-east Colorado and at least one Nebraska county after nighttime drone flights in the region caused a national stir last week.

Clusters of drones flying at night have remained a mystery to local law enforcement officials and residents seeking to learn the identities of the operators and the purpose of the flights, The Denver Post reported.

Sheriff's offices in Lincoln, Washington and Sedgwick counties were getting calls last week about the drones after initial reports came out of Phillips and Yuma counties, sheriffs said.

The drones reportedly have 6-foot wingspans and fly in gridlike patterns hundreds of feet in the air in groups of six to 10, authorities said.

Man dies in mugging that netted thieves \$1

NY NEW YORK — A man who was kicked and punched while defending his partner during a \$1 mugging on Christmas Eve has died.

Juan Fresnada, 60, died Friday at the Bronx hospital where he was taken in critical condition after the mugging early Dec. 24, the New York Police Department said Saturday. Officers released surveillance photos and videos in hopes of pinpointing suspects.

His partner, Byron Caceres, 29, told the Daily News of New York that Fresnada suffered the fatal blows while trying to spare him and urging him to run to safety, which he did.

Police said the two men were walking in the Morrisania neighborhood of the Bronx around 1:30 a.m. when several muggers approached them and demanded their property. When they refused, they were attacked.

The muggers took \$1 from the men and fled, police said.

Patton tank returns after a makeover

SC SUMTER — A Cold War-era M48 Patton tank has gotten a much-needed makeover and is back outside Patton Hall at a South Carolina Air Force base.

It is on display at the U.S. Army Central Command's headquarters on Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter.

"The effects of the sun and weather are pretty harsh to a vehicle sitting out in the elements every day for a decade," Michael Clauss, command historian, told The Post and Courier of Charlotte.

Mystery Grinch leaves note on family's lights

NJ HADDONFIELD — Residents of a southern New Jersey town are wondering who left an anonymous and snarky note telling a family their Christmas lights display was sorely lacking.

Angela Beatty said the note appeared on her doorstep in Haddonfield on Christmas Eve and said the decorations displayed a "lack of neat, organized and/or classy lighting."

It said it was sent by the "S & V Panel" and urged the family to "reflect on your flaws this offseason and correct them for next year," and enclosed a box of white lights to "jump start your 2020 planning."

Baby Jesus missing again from Nativity

KS WICHITA — A Wichita church said a baby Jesus statue has been stolen — again — from an outdoor Nativity scene.

The Church of the Blessed Sacrament said in a Facebook post that it would like the statue back, "no questions asked."

When the statue went missing in January 2018, the church posted a sign that read, "This is why we can't have nice things." The sign asked people to pray for the statue's return.

The statue later was found in a yard of a home and returned.

Endangered black rhino delivers 1st calf

MI LANSING — A black rhino that is part of a critically endangered species delivered her first calf at a Lansing zoo, officials announced on Christmas Eve.

The unnamed calf was born at Potter Park Zoo.

The 12-year-old mother, Doppsee, nuzzled her baby within minutes and the calf was standing up about 90 minutes later, according to the zoo.

The calf, which is bonding with its mother, won't be seen by the public until spring. Both animals will be monitored closely the next few weeks.

Man shows toy trains at retirement home

IA WASHINGTON — A former bricklayer made a deal with an eastern Iowa retirement home when he became a resident to allow him to put up a display of model trains.

Jim Bennett, of Washington, said the holiday season is his favorite time for the past 10 years because he gets to prac-

tice and display his enthusiasm being a train engineer, KCRG-TV reported.

His train display is in the lobby of the United Presbyterian Home in the town of 7,400 people about 50 miles south of Cedar Rapids.

Shotgun blast wounds man taking out trash

UT ROY — A Utah man taking out trash was wounded when a shotgun accidentally discharged as it was being cleaned inside the home of a neighbor who got the weapon as a Christmas present, police said.

The wounded man was struck in the abdomen by at least one large shotgun pellet that went through the neighbor's front and screen doors, Roy Police Department officials said.

Fire officials said the wounded man was conscious, breathing and alert when taken to a hospital.

Boy helps to pay off students' lunch debt

VT COLCHESTER — A Vermont student helped to pay his classmates' unpaid lunch bills this Christmas.

Justin Sears launched a GoFundMe page with help from his parents to raise \$600 to cover the lunch debt at the Malletts Bay School in Colchester, Mychamplainvalley.com reported.

As of Christmas Day, nearly \$900 had been donated through the page.

"Giving is not just about making a donation, it's about making a difference." — "And this will make a difference in allowing families to start fresh in the new year," the page states.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

49ers make stand; Pats miss on bye

Associated Press

Tom Brady and the New England Patriots will be playing in the postseason a week earlier than usual.

The defending Super Bowl champions open the playoffs during wild-card weekend for the first time since 2009 after they lost 27-24 to the Miami Dolphins on Sunday, and Patrick Mahomes and the Kansas City Chiefs beat the Los Angeles Chargers 31-21 to earn a first-round bye.

"We didn't play the way we're capable of playing and it ended up costing us," Brady said. "Just too many bad mistakes."

The Patriots (12-4) are the No. 3 overall seed in the AFC and will have to fix things in a hurry as they host Tennessee (9-7) next Saturday night.

"We've got a game next week; we've got to get ready to go," Patriots safety Devin McCourty said. "Nobody should feel sorry for us, we shouldn't feel sorry for ourselves. Our goal is to play in the playoffs."

We got a shot next week at all of that."

San Francisco earned the No. 1 seed and home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs with a 26-21 victory at Seattle. Jimmy Garoppolo and the NFC West champion 49ers (13-3) held on and sent Russell Wilson and the Seahawks (11-5) on the road to open the playoffs in the wild-card round next Sunday at Philadelphia.

"It's a good step in the right direction," Garoppolo said. "We've got a long way to go, though."

The Titans clinched their spot by beating Houston 35-14, eliminating Pittsburgh and Oakland in the process. All three teams had a chance at the playoffs, but Tennessee had the easiest path by needing to win — and got it against a Texans squad that rested several starters, including quarterback Deshaun Watson.

"I think it's great when you can determine whether you get

to continue to play football," Titans coach Mike Vrabel said. "There was some great effort, but we're going to have to improve and play better. Everything gets harder from here on out."

The last time New England played on wild-card weekend, it lost at home to the Ravens. The Patriots have never made it to the Super Bowl with Brady and coach Bill Belichick while playing in the opening round.

"We've got to move forward and get ready to go or the end of our season will be next week if we don't turn the page and play good football, way better than today," McCourty said. "Nobody feels sorry for the Patriots not getting a first-round bye in the playoffs."

Meanwhile, Kansas City (12-4) is the No. 2 seed and will be able to watch the opening round, along with the top-seeded Baltimore Ravens (14-2).

"We'll step back, the guys will come in tomorrow, we'll have a team meeting, I'll give them a

schedule for what's going on the next week here during the bye week," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "The main thing is we get work done, but we rest up and get ready for whoever we might play."

Kansas City's victory also locked Houston into the No. 4 seed, and the Texans (10-6) will host the Buffalo Bills (10-6) next Saturday.

Despite resting several starters, including quarterback Lamar Jackson, running back Mark Ingram, guard Marshal Yanda and safety Earl Thomas, Baltimore cruised past Pittsburgh 28-10 to ride into the playoffs on a 12-game winning streak.

"It's the best team in football in the regular season this year, but that doesn't count for anything in the next season," coach John Harbaugh said.

Green Bay earned a first-round bye in the NFC playoffs with a 23-20 victory at Detroit, the Packers' fifth consecutive victory.

NBA roundup

James, Davis help Lakers rout Mavericks

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James became the ninth player in NBA history to reach 9,000 assists, Anthony Davis scored 23 points and the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Dallas Mavericks 108-95 on Sunday night.

James — who turns 35 on Monday — reached the milestone with 4:35 remaining in the first quarter when he fired an outlet pass to Davis three-quarters of the way down the court for a dunk. It was one of 13 assists on the night for James. He finished with 13 points.

Davis was 8-for-12 from the field in his 26th game this season with 20 or more points. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added a season-high 19 points and Dwight Howard scored 15 points — all in the second quarter.

Luka Doncic led Dallas with 19 points but struggled from the field a night after

his ninth triple-double of the season. He shot 5-for-14 and missed all six of his three-point attempts.

Los Angeles has won two straight after a four-game losing streak.

Thunder 98, Raptors 97: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander matched his career-high with 32 points, Chris Paul had 25 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists and Oklahoma City won at Toronto for its sixth win in seven games.

Nerlens Noel added 13 points and Darius Bazley had 11 to help the Thunder win their fifth straight in Toronto. Oklahoma City has won 11 of 15 overall.

Kyle Lowry and Fred VanVleet each scored 20 points and Serge Ibaka had 12 points and 14 rebounds for the Raptors. They lost for the third time in four games.

Pelicans 127, Rockets 112: Lonzo Ball highlighted a season-high 27-point performance with a career-high seven three-pointers and host New Orleans

beat undermanned Houston for its fourth straight victory.

Brandon Ingram also had 27 points and Jrue Holiday and E'Twaun Moore each added 25.

Nuggets 120, Kings 115: Will Barton scored 19 points, including two free throws with eight seconds left, to help host Denver hold off Sacramento for its ninth victory in 10 games.

Michael Porter Jr. had a season-high 19 points and six rebounds in his first start. Nikola Jokic added 17 points and eight rebounds.

Grizzlies 117, Hornets 104: Dillon Brooks scored 20 points, rookie Brandon Clarke added 18 and host Memphis sent Charlotte to its fifth straight loss.

Jonas Valanciunas scored 16 points, and Jaren Jackson Jr. added 14 points and 12 rebounds for the Grizzlies. Malik Monk led Charlotte with 18 points off the bench.

NFL roundup

Chiefs top Chargers for AFC playoff bye

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Meccole Hardman returned a kickoff 104 yards for a touchdown, Damien Williams took a handoff 84 yards for another score, and the Chiefs leapfrogged New England for the No. 2 seed in the AFC and a first-round playoff bye with a 31-21 defeat of the Los Angeles Chargers.

The Chiefs (12-4) long ago clinched their fourth straight AFC West title, but they needed a win and an unlikely Dolphins victory over the Patriots to get a week off. And just as Williams punched into the end zone in the closing minutes for his second touchdown of the game, the Dolphins were scoring the go-ahead TD with 24 seconds left for their upset in Foxborough.

Now, the Patriots will have to play next weekend while the Chiefs set their sights on the divisional round of the playoffs.

The Chargers (5-11) made it stressful for Kansas City in the fourth quarter, though, driving for a touchdown that got them within 24-21 with 5:23 to go. But the Chiefs answered with an eight-play, 77-yard scoring drive that allowed them to wrap up their sixth straight win overall and 11th victory in 12 meetings with their longtime division rival.

Dolphins 27, Patriots 24: Miami won at defending Super Bowl champion New England, forcing the Pats into the wild-card playoff round.

Ryan Fitzpatrick tossed a 5-yard touchdown pass to tight end Mike Gesicki with 24 seconds remaining for the stunning victory.

New England (12-4) will have to play in the opening weekend of the postseason for the first time since 2009. The Patriots never have made the Super Bowl while playing in the wild-card round. They will host Tennessee next Saturday night.

New England won its first eight games, then split the next eight, including the rarity of two losses at home.

It is the second straight sea-

son the Dolphins have denied the Patriots an unbeaten division record. They scored on a wild series of laterals on the final play in their second meeting last season, in Miami.

Eagles 34, Giants 17: Carson Wentz and the Philadelphia Eagles are heading to the playoffs thanks to a group of players off the practice squad.

Boston Scott ran for three touchdowns in the second half and the injury-ravaged Eagles won at New York to win the NFC East title.

Philadelphia hosts Seattle (11-5) in a wild-card game next Sunday.

Titans 35, Texans 14: Derrick Henry and Tennessee ran their way into the playoffs, winning on the road against a Houston team that rested several starters and setting up an intriguing first-round matchup with New England.

Henry rushed for a season-high 211 yards and three touchdowns. The Texans beat the Titans two weeks ago to take control of the AFC South and locked up the division last week, allowing Houston (10-6) to sit quarterback Deshaun Watson and other key players.

49ers 26, Seahawks 2: San Francisco won the NFC West and the No. 1 seed when Jacob Hollister was stopped by rookie linebacker Dre Greenlaw on fourth-and-goal just inches short of the goal line. The 49ers, playing on the road, claimed their first division crown since 2012 and wrapped up home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs by silencing a crowd that showed up looking for a division title and to celebrate the return of Marshawn Lynch.

Cowboys 47, Redskins 16: Dak Prescott threw four touchdown passes in a win rendered meaningless when host Dallas was eliminated from the playoffs by Philadelphia's victory.

The Cowboys (8-8) lost control of their playoff future with a 17-9 loss at the Eagles last week. Last season's NFC East

champions will now wait to see how much longer Jason Garrett will be coach after under-achieving in the final year of his contract.

Packers 23, Lions 20: Mason Crosby kicked a 33-yard field goal as time expired, lifting Green Bay to a first-round bye with a win at Detroit.

The Packers (13-3) fell behind by two touchdowns in the second quarter. They didn't lead until Crosby made his second winning kick against the Lions this season.

Saints 42, Panthers 10: New Orleans took care of business against reeling Carolina and finished off a 13-3 regular season but still have to host Minnesota next Sunday in a wild-card game.

Drew Brees threw for 253 yards and three touchdowns, Alvin Kamara ran for two scores and the Saints handed the host Panthers their eighth straight loss. But the runaway NFC South champions' chances at home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs ended when Green Bay beat Detroit on a last-second field goal.

Ravens 28, Steelers 10: Slogging through the rain without several notable stars and with very little at stake, host Baltimore relied on a strong defensive performance to finish the regular season riding a 12-game winning streak.

The Ravens' first touchdown followed a fumble by Pittsburgh rookie quarterback Devlin Hodges, who failed to generate any offense in a game that meant far more to the Steelers (8-8) than to Baltimore (14-2).

Broncos 16, Raiders 15: Shelby Harris knocked down Derek Carr's 2-point pass to Hunter Renfrow with 7 seconds left and host Denver put an end to Oakland's run as an NFL city.

The Raiders (7-9) nearly made the Broncos (7-9) pay dearly for Garrett Bolles' latest penalty, a personal foul that pushed Brandon McManus

way back for a 57-yard field-goal attempt, which sailed wide left, giving Oakland the ball at its 45-yard line with 1:41 remaining.

Jaguars 38, Colts 20: Gardner Minshew turned in his best performance in two months, throwing for 295 yards and three touchdowns for host Jacksonville. The rookie closed out the Jaguars' disappointing season by strengthening his case to be the team's starting quarterback next season. Coach Doug Marrone might be around, too.

Rams 31, Cardinals 24: Tyler Higbee and Robert Woods caught touchdown passes from Jared Goff in the fourth quarter, and host the Rams farewell to the Los Angeles Coliseum and secured their third straight winning season.

Bears 21, Vikings 19: Eddy Pineiro's fourth field goal of the game for Chicago came from 22 yards with 10 seconds left with host Minnesota resting its regulars for the playoffs.

Bengals 33, Browns 23: Andy Dalton threw for a touchdown and ran for another in his farewell as a franchise quarterback — a Joe Burrow banner in the upper deck reminded him what comes next — and host Cincinnati ended one of its most miserable seasons with a victory.

Falcons 28, Buccaneers 22 (OT): Deion Jones intercepted Jameis Winston on the first play of overtime and returned the ball 27 yards for a touchdown to give Atlanta a win on the road.

Winston became the first Tampa Bay quarterback to pass for 5,000 yards in a season, but another non-playoff year ended on a sour note.

Jets 13, Bills 6: Sam Darnold hit Jamison Crowder for a 1-yard touchdown pass in the fourth quarter, and New York avoided finishing its fourth consecutive season with double-digit losses in a win at Buffalo.

NHL roundup

Blues rout Jets for 8th straight win

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Jaden Schwartz scored twice and Jordan Binnington made 25 saves to help the St. Louis Blues beat the Winnipeg Jets 4-1 on Sunday for their season-best eighth straight victory.

Ryan O'Reilly and Robert Thomas also scored for St. Louis. The defending champion Blues improved to 26-8-6, outscoring opponents 32-16 during the winning streak. They had a seven-game streak Oct. 27-Nov. 9.

"You wouldn't even know it in the room," Binnington said. "Everyone's just trying to keep working together and taking it day by day and those wins are coming."

Nicholas Shore scored and Connor Hellebuyck made 24 saves for Winnipeg. The Jets have lost six of eight to fall to 21-15-3.

Bruins 3, Sabres 2: Jake DeBrusk scored two power-play goals 18 seconds apart

early in the third period and host Boston completed a home-and-home sweep of Buffalo.

David Pastrnak added his NHL-leading 29th goal and Tuukka Rask made 24 saves for the Bruins. They have earned at least one point in each of their last seven games, going 4-0-3.

Islanders 3, Wild 1: Ryan Pulock and Matt Martin scored in a 1:37 span early in the third period and struggling New York rallied to win at Minnesota.

Tom Kuhnhackl scored late and Semyon Varlamov stopped 25 shots for the Islanders, who won for the second time in their past six games. Ryan Donato scored for the Wild.

Lightning 2, Red Wings 1: Brayden Point scored a power-play goal in the third period and host Tampa Bay beat Detroit for its third straight victory.

The Lightning have won 16 consecutive regular-season games against the Red Wings, the longest winning streak in franchise history against one

opponent, and the third-longest in NHL history.

Panthers 6, Canadiens 5: Jonathan Huberdeau scored two goals in just over 30 seconds and added two assists, and host Florida's top line had a nine-point game against Montreal.

Aleksander Barkov had two goals and an assist and Mike Matheson added a goal and two assists for the Panthers. Noel Acciari also scored and Evgenii Dadonov finished with two assists. Sergei Bobrovsky made 37 saves.

Blackhawks 3, Blue Jackets 2 (SO): Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane scored shoot-out goals in Chicago's win at Columbus.

Blackhawks goalie Robin Lehner stopped Nathan Gerbe in the third round of the tie-breaker to seal the win. Lehner made 31 saves.

Flyers 2, Ducks 1 (OT): Kevin Hayes scored at 3:53 of overtime and Brian Elliott made 27 saves in Philadelphia's fifth victory in six games.

Sean Couturier scored in the first period and Jakub Voracek had two assists for the Flyers in the second stop of their six-game West Coast trip.

Stars 4, Coyotes 2: Roope Hintz scored the go-ahead goal late in Dallas' four-goal third period in a win at Arizona.

Hintz's made it 3-2 with 4:09 left to play, and Mattias Janmark sealed the Stars' second straight win with an empty-netter with 1:36 remaining.

Devils 4, Senators 3 (OT): Jack Hughes scored 54 seconds into overtime to lift New Jersey to a win at Ottawa.

Hughes broke loose with the puck on his backhand, switched to the forehand and flipped the puck over goalie Craig Anderson for his sixth of the season.

Canucks 5, Flames 2: Tyler Myers scored twice and added an assist to help Vancouver take a 3-0 lead in the first period in a win at Calgary. Tanner Pearson also scored twice and Jake Virtanen added a goal. The Canucks have won five in a row.

College basketball roundup

No. 22 West Virginia rallies in upset of No. 2 Ohio State

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Miles McBride scored six of his season-high 21 points in the final 2:22 and No. 22 West Virginia rallied to beat No. 2 Ohio State 67-59 Sunday.

The Mountaineers (11-1) trailed by nine late in the first half but went ahead for good at 55-54 on a push-shot by Derek Culver with 3:31 left. McBride, a freshman guard, followed with two free throws and an 18-foot jump shot to extend the lead to 59-54.

Kaleb Wesson's three-pointer pulled the Buckeyes (11-2) within 61-57 with 51 seconds remaining, but they missed two shots on their next possession. Ohio State was held to a season low in points and committed season highs of 22 turnovers and 25 fouls.

No. 5 Kansas 72, Stanford 56: Isaiah Moss made three straight three-pointers during a decisive second-half stretch and

finished with 17 points, helping the visiting Jayhawks overcome an inconsistent performance on both ends.

No. 6 Oregon 98, Alabama State 59: Chris Duarte scored a season-high 31 points and the host Ducks rolled in their final tuneup before Pac-12 play.

No. 8 Auburn 86, Lipscomb 59: Danjel Purifoy had 17 points and nine rebounds and the Tigers improved to 12-0. Auburn remained one of two undefeated teams nationally.

No. 11 Michigan 86, Umass Lowell 60: Jon Teske had 25 points and eight rebounds, Eli Brooks added 15 points and the host Wolvernies closed their nonconference schedule with a rout.

No. 13 Maryland 84, Bryant 70: Anthony Cowan Jr. scored 19 points and the host Terrapins ended a two-game slide in the nonconference finale for both teams.

No. 14 Michigan State 95, Western

Michigan 62: Foster Loyer scored a career-high 16 points in his start for the host Spartans, who shook off a slow start without All-American Cassius Winston.

No. 16 Virginia 65, Navy 56: Kihei Clark scored five points during a 12-0 second-half run and the host Cavaliers overcame a sloppy effort.

No. 20 Penn State 90, Cornell 59: Mike Watkins scored 16 of his 19 points in the first half for the host Nittany Lions.

No. 23 Texas Tech 73, Cal State Bakersfield 58: Kyler Edwards scored 18 of his 20 points after halftime and the Red Raiders pulled away to win their 54th consecutive home game against nonconference teams.

No. 25 Iowa 93, Kennesaw State 51: Luka Garza scored 23 points and Ryan Kriener added a career-high 20 as the host Hawkeyes closed their nonconference schedule with a win.