

DOD backs boosters amid COVID surge

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The Department of Defense recommended COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for all eligible civilian employees and service members on Tuesday as the United States hit a record number of new coronavirus cases.

The DOD urged anyone over age 18 and already vaccinated to get the booster as a means of mitigating the surge in coronavirus cases associated with the delta and omicron variants, according to a memo from Michael Donley, director for administration and management at the Pentagon.

The same day, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 441,278 new coronavirus cases in the U.S., the highest number since the beginning of the pandemic and nearly 150,000 more cases than the previous high of 294,015 on Jan. 8.

While active cases are climbing, deaths have steadily decreased from the last significant peak in September. The CDC reported 1,627 deaths on Dec. 27, down from the last peak of 2,394 deaths Sept. 24 or the

peak of 4,048 deaths on Jan. 13.

The booster shot is not mandatory for uniformed members and civilian employees, according to Donley's memo. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered mandatory vaccinations against COVID-19 in August. Each service set its own timeline.

The memo cited a rise in active cases within the area around Washington, D.C.

In addition to urging individuals to get their booster shots, the memo also recommends DOD personnel returning to the workplace after the holidays to check themselves for the virus using a home-testing kit approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

The Navy issued a similar advisory on boosters on Dec. 21, signed by Vice Adm. Bill Merz, the Navy's deputy chief of naval operations.

"Because all studies are converging on the need for a vaccine booster to ensure enduring protection, it is essentially becoming the next shot in a series and will likely become mandatory in the near future," Merz said in the memo.

The number of coronavirus cases outside the U.S. has also climbed over the past month. For the week of Dec. 20, the World Health Organization reported a global total of 5.4 million new cases, the highest since May.

For the U.S. military, the surge in new cases has caused some complications.

At Marine Corps base Camp Hansen in Okinawa, Japan, initial reports of "multiple Marines" infected with the coronavirus on Dec. 17 rapidly ballooned into 280 active cases by Tuesday. The situation led Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki to criticize U.S. military discipline.

Likewise, 25% of the crew aboard the littoral combat ship USS Milwaukee — about two dozen sailors — tested positive for COVID-19 as of Monday, according to a report from the Associated Press. Some test samples were found to be the omicron variant.

The ship, which was en route to the U.S. Southern Command region, was sidelined at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay in Cuba as a result.

Ford's last weapons elevator passes tests 11 years late

Daily Press

The last of USS Gerald R. Ford's 11 weapons elevators, one of four major new technologies on the Navy's newest carrier, has been formally delivered — some 11 years after the original due date.

The elevators can lift more weight — up to 24,000 pounds — than those on other carriers. Their design also allows significantly safer operation.

But formal delivery meant verifying how each of the elevators fit in their different spaces on the Ford, a challenging task since they don't work properly if critical parts are knocked out of place. The tolerances for that are less than one-sixteenth of an inch.

Formal delivery also required validating safety procedures, fire protections and the ways sailors handle and move weapons.

Those validations only came after testing and repeated re-testing, in port and while the carrier was at sea earlier this year.

"This is a significant milestone for the Navy,

ship and her crew," said Rear Adm. James P. Downey, program executive officer for aircraft carriers. "With completion of this final AWE (advanced weapons elevator), we now have the entire system to operate and train with."

Because the elevators can lift more weight, they allow the Ford to stock a wider range of weapons for its air wing.

They're arranged differently, too. Elevators on the Navy's other carriers lift ordnance from magazines deep in the hull directly to the flight deck, which is where ordnance sailors often must do final assembly and arming.

The Ford's elevators are set up to deliver weapons in two stages, from the magazine to an assembly and arming stage inside the hull and away from the busy flight deck, and then from there to the flight deck to be attached to aircraft.

The elevators move on steel rails, powered by traveling "stators" — the electromagnets at the heart of electric motors — or by a backup

system of motors on the platform itself.

The rails, stators and backup platform motors replace the hydraulic systems used in other weapons elevators and mean there's no leaking oil or hydraulic fluid around to create a fire hazard while handling explosives.

On the flight deck, meanwhile, the elevators' hatches are in two parts, which means that when open, they don't reach as high. That makes it easier for airplanes to move around the flight deck, and cuts down blind spots for sailors who must always keep a sharp eye out for planes in motion.

Sailors and hundreds of craftsmen, technicians and engineers from Newport News Shipbuilding worked around the clock, through several holidays and underway periods to bring the elevators online, Downey said.

The Ford is now back at the yard for a final check-up before launching into the training required for deployment. It will come out of the yard on schedule in the spring, Downey said.

US ships remain in Med amid Russia fears

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has ordered a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier strike group to stay in the Mediterranean Sea region rather than move on to the Middle East, amid worries about the buildup of thousands of Russian troops near the Ukraine border.

A defense official said Tuesday that the change in the

schedule of the USS Harry S. Truman, and the five American warships accompanying it, reflects the need for a persistent presence in Europe. It is necessary in order to reassure U.S. allies and partners in the region, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military deployment details.

The United States and Western allies have watched as the

buildup of Russian troops near the border grew to a peak of an estimated 100,000, fueling fears that Moscow was preparing to invade Ukraine.

Russia has denied any intention of launching a new invasion and instead has accused Ukraine of hatching plans to try to use force to reclaim control of the territories held by Moscow-backed rebels. Ukraine has rejected that claim.

The Truman strike group includes five U.S. ships — the cruiser USS San Jacinto and the guided missile destroyers USS Cole, USS Bainbridge, USS Gravelly and USS Jason Dunham. Also with them is the Royal Norwegian Navy frigate HNoMS Fridtjof Nansen.

The Truman left its homeport of Norfolk, Va., on Dec. 1 and entered the Mediterranean Sea on Dec. 14.

Marine tilt-rotor squadron shifts from Spain to Sicily

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A U.S. Marine Corps tilt-rotor squadron has been assigned to Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily to provide air support for military operations in Africa.

Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 365 arrived in November and is operating as part of Marine Corps Forces Europe and Africa's north and west Africa response force, according to a statement Tuesday.

The squadron flies MV-22 Ospreys as the air combat element of a crisis response force. It has aircraft on alert and is ready to assist with a variety of needs, said Maj. Thomas Gruber, operations officer for the squadron.

The statement did not say how many Ospreys were involved in the move. Normally, a Marine Osprey squadron consists of 12 aircraft.

MARFOREUR/AF said Wednesday that the squadron is the north Africa ACE while another unit assigned to Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti will be the east Africa ACE. There are no plans to

provide additional tilt-rotor capability at this time, MARFOREUR/AF said.

NARF-ACE operations also include C-130 aircraft, the statement said.

Earlier this month, the detachment participated in an air-to-ground training exercise with the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) and the U.S. Air Force at Aviano Air Base, in northeastern Italy.

In November, the squadron flew NATO ambassadors to the British navy's HMS Queen Elizabeth off the coast of Italy to view U.K. and U.S. F-35 Lightning jets take off and land.

"We're always flying training events, including integration with the (NARF) ground combat element based in northern Italy," said Gruber, adding that the unit was previously based in Rota, Spain.

The unit is the newest to make NAS Sigonella its home, the release stated.

The Navy's Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 (Detachment 1), which flies MH-60S armed helicopters, arrived in August with about 25 officers and enlisted members.

US spy planes fly sortie over Ukraine amid Russia tensions

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

A pair of Air Force spy planes flew over eastern Ukraine this week, even as Washington and Moscow prepare for talks intended to allay fears of a new Russian invasion of its southwestern neighbor.

Watchers of flight-tracking data reported the mission Monday near Russian-occupied territory. It involved an E-8C battlefield surveillance plane and an RC-135V Rivet Joint signals intelligence aircraft, data showed.

U.S. Air Forces in Europe did not respond to a query Wednesday about the mission, which was previously reported by Forbes.

Public flight data indicated that the surveillance plane flew out of Ramstein Air Base in Germany, while the Rivet Joint took off from Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete. That means they flew with their transponders on.

The flights come amid heightened tensions over a Russian military buildup along the Ukrainian border. Some estimates said the Kremlin had amassed 100,000 troops at the peak of the buildup.

U.S. officials and others have

warned that Moscow was planning an attack on Ukraine, which Russia has denied.

Russian officials said Saturday that thousands of troops had returned to their home bases. The surveillance mission may have been aimed at assessing the latest situation on the ground.

On Thursday, President Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin were scheduled to speak in a call, The Associated Press reported.

The two leaders will discuss "a range of topics, including upcoming diplomatic engagements," National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne said. Washington and Moscow are set to meet Jan. 10 to discuss stability concerns, and a NATO-Russia meeting is expected to follow on Jan. 12.

The E-8C Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System, or JSTARS, is a heavily modified Boeing 707-300 jet whose most prominent feature is a 24-foot radar antenna that can cover an area over 30,000 square miles, the Air Force has said.

Flight-tracking data suggest that it may have flown within 40 miles of Russian-occupied areas, though such data is not always accurate.

Jan. 6 panel set to shield some documents

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House committee investigating the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol has agreed to defer its attempt to get hundreds of pages of records from the Trump administration, holding off at the request of the Biden White House.

The deferral is in response to concerns by the Biden White House that releasing all the Trump administration documents sought by the committee could compromise national security and executive privilege.

President Joe Biden has repeatedly rejected former President Donald Trump's blanket efforts to cite executive privilege to block the release of documents surrounding that day. But Biden's White House is still working with the committee to shield some documents from being turned over.

Trump is appealing to the Su-

preme Court to try to block the National Archives and Records Administration, which maintains custody of the documents from his time in office, from giving them to the committee.

The agreement to keep some Trump-era records away from the committee is memorialized in a Dec. 16 letter from the White House counsel's office. It mostly shields records that do not involve the events of Jan. 6 but were covered by the committee's sweeping request for documents from the Trump White House about the events of that day.

Dozen of pages created Jan. 6 don't pertain to the assault on the Capitol. Other documents involve sensitive preparations and deliberations by the National Security Council. Biden's officials were worried that if those pages were turned over to Congress, that would set a troublesome prece-

dent for the executive branch, no matter who is president.

Still other documents are highly classified and the White House asked Congress to work with the federal agencies that created them to discuss their release.

"The documents for which the Select Committee has agreed to withdraw or defer its request do not appear to bear on the White House's preparations for or response to the events of January 6, or on efforts to overturn the election or otherwise obstruct the peaceful transfer of power," White House deputy counsel Jonathan Su wrote in a letter to the committee obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press.

Su wrote that for the committee, withholding the documents "should not compromise its ability to complete its critical investigation expeditiously."

Committee spokesman Tim

Mulvey said: "The committee has agreed to defer action on certain records as part of the accommodations process, as was the case with an earlier tranche of records. The Select Committee has not withdrawn its request for these records and will continue to engage with the executive branch to ensure the committee gets access to all the information relevant to our probe."

For the last several months the National Archives has been transmitting tranches of documents to the White House and to lawyers for Trump to determine whether they contain any privileged information. The National Archives has said that the records Trump wants to block include presidential diaries, visitor logs, speech drafts and handwritten notes "concerning the events of January 6" from the files of former chief of staff Mark Meadows.

Surge in virus cases hits Marine air base in Japan

By JOSEPH DITZLER
Stars and Stripes

A Marine Corps air base in Japan reported 80 new coronavirus cases Wednesday, more than it experienced in all of January, its pandemic peak, thus far.

Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, about 25 miles south of Hiroshima, reported a modest increase, 13 new cases of COVID-19, the coronavirus respiratory disease, over the Christmas weekend, according to base news releases.

But on Wednesday, the air base, where Navy fighter squadrons assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan are stationed, reported another 80 cases in a succinct news release that provided no further details. Marine Corps fighters and aerial refuelers are also stationed there.

The surge comes as service

members, civilian employees and their families return to the air base from holiday travels.

The base commander, Col. Lance Lewis, in an emailed message to the air base community, went to the point.

"Well, there is no easy way to say this so let me be up front; over the past few days, we have seen a surge of cases among our SOFA population," he wrote, referring to the status of forces agreement by which uniformed and civilian members of the U.S. military live in Japan. "Like the 'Jelly of the Month Club,' COVID is the holiday gift that keeps on giving."

Lewis imposed a series of restrictions until Jan. 14 aimed at curbing the virus's spread. He imposed a mask requirement in all base facilities for everyone, regardless of vaccination status, and at all times while off the base.

Oklahoma suit over Guard vaccine mandate rejected

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — A federal judge in Oklahoma on Tuesday ruled against the state in its lawsuit challenging the vaccine mandates for members of the Oklahoma National Guard in a dispute that is the first critical test of the military's authority to require National Guard troops to get the shot.

U.S. District Judge Stephen Friot denied Oklahoma's request for a preliminary injunction, saying the claims by Gov. Kevin Stitt, Attorney General John O'Connor and 16 anonymous Oklahoma National Guard members were without merit.

"The vaccine mandate to which the governor objects is the one — in addition to the nine that already apply to all service members — intended to protect service members from the virus which has, in less than two years, killed more Americans than

have been killed in action in all of the wars the United States has ever fought," Friot wrote. "The court is required to decide the case on the basis of federal law, not common sense. But, either way, the result would be the same."

Stitt and O'Connor have been outspoken critics of vaccine mandates, even for military members, and have filed numerous lawsuits challenging such federal mandates.

A spokesman for the Oklahoma National Guard declined to comment while litigation is pending.

Stitt and O'Connor filed the federal lawsuit over the Guard vaccine requirement earlier this month, with Stitt saying in a statement that President Joe Biden's Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin overstepped his constitutional authority by subjecting the National Guard to the mandate.

Snow, cold slam Northwest, Sierra Nevada

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Pacific Northwest and Sierra Nevada grappled Tuesday with another day of snow, ice and unseasonable cold that has disrupted traffic, caused closures and forced people to find refuge in emergency warming shelters.

Across western Washington and Oregon, officials and private groups opened emergency spaces for people as forecasters said the extreme cold from an arctic blast that blew in Sunday could last until the weekend.

Farther south, part of the main highway from San Francisco to Reno remained closed Tuesday for a third day due to record-setting snow in the Lake Tahoe area after a winter storm blasted across northern California and Nevada.

Snow-choked Interstate 80 shut down Sunday from the Nevada state line to Placer Coun-

ty, Calif., although Caltrans said U.S. 50 reopened late Monday for vehicles with chains or four-wheel drive.

Snow showers began in the Northwest on Sunday from the Gulf of Alaska, dumping up to 6 inches across the Seattle area. Another storm dropped more snow in western Washington and Oregon late Monday and Tuesday.

The region continued to break daily cold records. The National Weather Service said the low was 17 degrees F in Seattle on Monday, breaking a record set in 1968. Bellingham, Wash., plunged to 7 F on Monday, tying a record set in 1968.

In Seattle, the city said garbage pickup was canceled for Tuesday, as side streets remained treacherous. And another round of snow was predicted for the Seattle and Portland, Ore., areas on Thursday.

State officials in Oregon have declared an emergency. In Multnomah County — home to Portland — about a half dozen weather shelters were open.

On Tuesday, county officials said a resident died from exposure to cold temperatures on Saturday, KGW-TV reported. The person who died was not homeless but was found unresponsive outdoors, according to a news release from Multnomah County. No further information was released.

Two snowmobilers died in an avalanche in the mountains north of Yellowstone National Park, where about 3 feet of snow had fallen over the past week, the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center said. The avalanche Monday brought down snow about 5 feet deep and approximately 300 feet wide, burying two of the four riders.

DA: No criminal charges for Cuomo from 2 allegations

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo won't face criminal charges stemming from allegations from two women — including a state trooper — that he planted unwanted kisses on their cheeks, a suburban prosecutor said Tuesday. It's the latest in a series of decisions about whether a raft of sexual assault and harassment claims against Cuomo will end up in criminal court.

Westchester County District Attorney Mimi Rocah said that while there was evidence to conclude the conduct the women described did occur, she couldn't bring criminal cases over it.

"In both instances, my office has determined that, although the allegations and witnesses were credible, and the conduct concerning, we cannot pursue criminal charges due to the statutory requirements of the criminal laws of New York," Rocah said in a statement.

Cuomo had no immediate comment on the decision. The Democrat has denied sexually harassing anyone or touching anyone inappropriately and has said he doesn't recall touching the trooper.

A number of prosecutors around the state launched investigations after state Attorney General Letitia James, a Democrat, chronicled accusations from 11 women against

Cuomo. The August report led to his resignation from office, although he has attacked the findings as biased and inaccurate.

In October, the Albany County sheriff's office filed a misdemeanor groping complaint against Cuomo, but a week later the district attorney asked a judge for more time to evaluate the evidence.

The district attorney said the sheriff's one-page criminal complaint, based on allegations from a woman who said Cuomo slid his hand up her blouse and grabbed her breast at the governor's mansion in late 2020, was "potentially defective." At the prosecutor's request, a court delayed Cuomo's scheduled arraignment until Jan. 7.

Documents, money pulled from Lee statue time capsule

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Conservation experts in Virginia's capital pulled books, money, ammunition, documents and other artifacts Tuesday from a long-sought-after time capsule found in the remnants of a pedestal that once held a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

Over the course of about two hours, the team sliced open the 36-pound copper box and meticulously pried apart and documented the damp contents. The box had been tucked in a foundation cornerstone of the massive — and now mostly deconstructed — Richmond monument since

1887.

The time capsule had drawn substantial interest, both because it proved to be elusive during an earlier search and because historical records had led to some speculation it might contain a rare photo of President Abraham Lincoln after his death. Ultimately, such a photo was not found.

The conservation team was able to identify many of the items immediately as they were pulled from the box, though some materials were warped from water damage and required further study. Experts were on hand to triage the artifacts.

"They were more waterlogged than we

had hoped, but not as bad as it could have been," said Kate Ridgway, the lead conservator for the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

The time capsule had been found a day earlier — buried and sitting in water — by workers wrapping up the removal of the Lee statue pedestal.

Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam ordered the enormous equestrian statue of Lee removed in 2020, amid the global protest movement sparked by the police killing of George Floyd. Litigation pushed back his plans, and the statue was not removed until September, after a court cleared the way.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Gifts gone from luggage, replaced with dog food

NH PORTSMOUTH — A New Hampshire woman who returned from a flight to Europe with more than \$3,000 worth of gifts in her luggage found the contents gone — and replaced with dog food.

Gina Sheldon, of Portsmouth, also found an old T-shirt and a shaving cream bottle in her bag, WMUR-TV reported.

Sheldon said she spent 11 days in Italy and stopped in Paris for a few days for business on her way home recently.

She booked her flight through Delta Air Lines, but it was operated by Air France.

“We have affirmatively connected with our partners at Air France and the customer to find a resolution,” Delta told the station in a statement.

Town seeking payment after corncob, straw fire

IN WINDFALL — Officials in a small central Indiana town plan to seek reimbursement from a straw storage business after fire crews spent weeks fighting a fire smoldering amid corncobs and straw bales.

Windfall Clerk-Treasurer Regina Schmitt said the smoky fire was first reported Dec. 16 on land leased by Simpson Straw.

She said volunteer firefighters pulled about 900,000 gallons of treated water from the town fighting the fire in the pile of corncobs, which stood up to 30 feet high. The town had to cut off its water supply twice because its water tower emptied and pumps were overheating, Schmitt said.

Schmitt said the town is working to generate a bill for the water to send to Simpson Straw’s insurer to seek reimbursement, the Kokomo Tribune reported.

First responders rescue woman hanging over cliff

OR CORBETT — Crews rescued a woman who slipped from the Multnomah Falls trail in snowy conditions and was clinging to a tree root above a 300-foot cliff, Corbett Fire officials said.

The fall was reported at Multnomah Falls in the Columbia River Gorge, KATU-TV reported.

Initial reports said a woman slipped off the trail and fell about 30 feet. She then grabbed on to some tree roots and was hanging over the 300-foot cliff, according to Corbett Fire.

First responders rappelled down and pulled her to safety. She was unhurt but was evaluated by medics at the scene, officials said.

FedEx driver arrested in series of break-ins

NC FRANKLIN — A North Carolina delivery driver was charged in a series of break-ins over several weeks after he was captured on a video surveillance camera inside a home, a sheriff’s office said.

The Macon County Sheriff’s Office said multiple thefts had been reported in the Highlands area. A break in the case occurred when a homeowner called to report their surveillance video showed a man wearing shorts who was in their home for a brief time.

A news release said the sheriff’s office identified the man as a FedEx driver.

Gregory Thomas Bufkin was arrested on multiple charges, including breaking and entering, officials said.

Most of the residences victimized had unlocked doors and open windows, the sheriff said.

Cow at sanctuary after fleeing slaughterhouse

NJ MORRISTOWN — A young cow that escaped from a New York City slaughterhouse was taken to an animal sanctuary in New Jersey.

The (Morristown) Daily Record reported that the 400-pound Hereford heifer, estimated to be about nine months old, ran away from a Queens business. The animal was corralled by rangers later in the day in Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

The next day, Skylands Animal Sanctuary and Rescue center in Sussex County posted that “Stacy” was in temporary quarantine at the 230-acre facility in Wantage. Director Mike Stura said the heifer will join 93 other bovines among the 450 other permanent residents at the center.

Fight over dog leads to deadly shooting

SC NEWBERRY — An argument over a dog led to a deadly South Carolina shooting, officials said.

Errick E. Walker, 36, was shot in the chest in a mobile home park near Newberry, officials told The State of Columbia.

Deputies arrested Jerod Joh-

nathan Blake, 38, who was a neighbor of Walker. The men had argued over a dog and Blake then fatally shot Walker, deputies said.

Deputies arrested Blake, charging him with murder and possessing a weapon during a violent crime.

Pump explodes when RV leaves with hose hooked

UT SALT LAKE CITY — A gas pump went up in flames when a recreational vehicle in Salt Lake City drove away with the hose still attached, officials said.

The pump was dragged by the RV, igniting a fireball, said Salt Lake City Fire Department Battalion Chief Dan Walker. It was stopped shortly after before anybody was injured when employees at the gas station hit an emergency stop button, he said.

An unidentified person driving the RV drove away but was later found and was being questioned by police to assess for possible sanctions, he said.

UPS driver calls for help after smelling smoke

ME MOUNT VERNON — A UPS driver alerted firefighters to smoke coming from a Maine home and waited for help to arrive before resuming his deliveries.

Nathan Allen, 40, of Augusta, noticed smoke coming from a garage when he was dropping off a package.

He called 911 and waited for local fire crews to arrive before he continued on with his delivery route, the Kennebec Journal reported.

— From wire reports



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Madden was beloved by everyone

BY CAM INMAN

The San Jose Mercury News

PLEASANTON, Calif. — John Madden and I were long past lunch and just shooting the bull at Vic's All-Star Café when a woman walked by with her son. She instantly recognized Madden and stopped in her tracks.

"Oh my gosh, you're my hero!" she gushed. "You taught me football. I grew up without a lot of men around me, and you explained everything about football so clearly to me."

She asked for a hug, then a picture. He made her day. He made it his life's work doing that for others, typically on Sundays, first as the Raiders Super Bowl-winning coach and later as an Emmy-winning broadcaster.

Madden, at least to me, was more than America's all-time best spokesman when it came to football — and steak houses, athlete's foot, hardware stores or, of course, video games.

He was a blend of father figure, good buddy, esteemed colleague, late-night comedian, writing muse, national icon and everyday sports fan.

He oozed common sense more than anyone I've ever met. A Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee. A Super Bowl-winning coach with the Raiders. A family patriarch that left his award-filled

broadcasting career to spend more time with his grandchildren.

I relished every conversation I ever had with him, just as I did with Bill Walsh and Al Davis, two of Madden's football compatriots who preceded him in death. Yes, death. Madden — or, John, as I always called him — passed away Tuesday at age 85.

"Hey, Wait a Minute (I wrote a book!)" is the title of a book he wrote in 1984. It's in my bookcase, in well-read paperback. Flip three pages and you'll see this: "To Virginia, Mike and Joe," a dedication to his wife and two sons.

John's family extended beyond them and to anyone who ever watched football — and those who didn't. He touched so many people, and won so many more friends than measly football games.

He taught us so much. He shared his insights, his humor, his love. I never took it for granted.

As I drove out of my neighborhood a few years ago, I came to a fork in the road. Turn left and go to the 49ers' facility for their latest news? Or turn right and see if Madden was at his nearby office?

"He's heading to lunch, but he wants to know how soon you can

get here," Joan, his long-time assistant, said on the phone.

Two minutes and a mile later, I walked into the lobby of Madden's office and found him sunk in a comfy, leather chair while one of his cherished grandsons kept him company.

After grabbing a quick quote for a football-related story, we sat and gabbed for 45 minutes. As usual. As awesome as ever.

In recent years, with his health declining and him losing his hearing, we mostly kept in touch via text, though I recall a phone call two years ago when he was with Vic — from Vic's All-Star Café — and suggesting I do a Super Bowl-week story on Vic's memorabilia — a Joe Montana helmet that was part 49ers, part Chiefs.

Oh, remember that lunch date I wrote about earlier from our time at Vic's? We swapped tales about football, about our alma mater Cal Poly, about our Pleasanton-based families, about anything and everything, including some NFL big wigs he counseled long ago but had now lost respect for.

We sat, in fact, at a table with his nameplate on it by the front door, ordering the "Coach Madden" menu item of corned beef hash and eggs. We spoke with no tape recorder or notepad on

hand this time. We were catching up, continuing a friendship and mentorship that began over a decade ago.

Before I really got to know him, John wandered into the 49ers locker room one day some 15 years ago. As I introduced myself to him, so did a cocky running back who told him he was going to win a bunch of Super Bowl rings. "Win the first one," Madden advised.

How did Madden and I click? I'd like to think we had similar backgrounds and perspectives. We both grew up in the Bay Area (he in Daly City, me in Cupertino). We both went to Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo. Our professional careers started in Santa Maria (he at Hancock College, me at the Santa Maria Times). We both moved to Pleasanton and started families.

Last but not least, we both shared a love for the game of football, resulting in the best, impromptu chats you can imagine.

Once, while at a charity golf tournament in Livermore, I somehow won the longest-drive competition. As I went up to accept the award, I passed John's table, to which he bellowed: "Sandbagger!"

You know what? He was the greatest sandbagger of all time. John could relate to anyone.

Air raid: Falcons switch it up, down Cardinals

Associated Press

DALLAS — Air Force changed its strategy Tuesday for the First Responder Bowl, taking inspiration from its name and trying out its passing game. It worked.

Haaziq Daniels threw for two touchdowns and ran for two more to give the Falcons a 31-28 win over Louisville.

Daniels completed 9 of 10 passes for a season-high 252 yards, leading a triple-option offense that came into the game averag-

ing an FBS-best 340.8 rushing yards and the second-fewest passing yards at 82.5 per game.

Air Force (10-3) didn't throw a pass in its final game of the regular season, a 48-14 win over UNLV, and took a streak of 94 straight rushes from scrimmage into its second possession Tuesday.

"I figured we'd (pass) more than we did in the last game," Falcons coach Troy Calhoun joked. "I just think sometimes you get in games, you make ad-

justments."

Cardinals coach Scott Satterfield lamented his shorthanded secondary getting beat on man-to-man coverage. Louisville (6-7) was missing defensive back Kenderick Duncan (injured) and Greedy Vance, who is transferring to Florida State.

"Anytime you play a team like this, they're going to take a shot," Satterfield said. "They connect — they're going to come back to it again."

Senior Brandon Lewis had

touchdown catches of 64 and 61 yards for Air Force, finishing with five receptions for a career-high 172 yards. That's the most receiving yardage for a Falcons player this season and the most ever in the Falcons' 28 bowl games.

"I feel like I could have been doing this all season," Lewis said. "I'm just happy that I did do it in my final game."

Matthew Dapore kicked a 26-yard field goal with 5:28 left to give Air Force a two-score lead.

UCLA pulls out of Holiday Bowl, irks NC State

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — They got to feed beluga whales, tour an aircraft carrier and see the end zone in a baseball stadium painted in team colors.

They did not get to play football.

About five hours before kickoff, the UCLA Bruins learned their Holiday Bowl matchup against No. 18 North Carolina State on Tuesday evening at Petco Park was canceled because of worsening COVID-19 issues with the Bruins.

The late notice touched off anger and conspiracy theories among the Wolfpack, with coach Dave Doeren describing a lack of communication from UCLA regarding the possibility that the Bruins would be unable to play.

“Felt lied to, to be honest,” Doeren told reporters at the team hotel. “We felt like UCLA probably knew something was going on,

didn’t tell anybody on our side. We had no clue they were up against that. I don’t feel like it was very well handled from their university. It would have been great to have had a heads-up so two or three days ago we could have found a Plan B. Disappointing.”

Birmingham Bowl

No. 21 Houston 17, Auburn 13: At Birmingham, Ala., Jake Herslow caught a 26-yard, go-ahead touchdown pass from Clayton Tune with 3:27 left to give the Cougars the win.

Houston (12-2) marched 80 yards on eight plays to cap its third season in program history with at least 12 wins. The Cougars snapped a four-game bowl losing streak and won 12 of their final 13 games, the only loss coming to No. 4 Cincinnati in the American Athletic Conference championship game.

The Tigers (6-7) went in the op-

posite direction in coach Bryan Harsin’s first season. They ended a season with five straight losses for the first time in 71 years and dropped their third bowl game in a row.

Liberty Bowl

Texas Tech 34, Mississippi State 7: At Memphis, Tenn., Donovan Smith threw for 252 yards and a touchdown and ran for another score, and the Red Raiders beat the Bulldogs.

Tahj Brooks rushed for 107 yards and a touchdown and Sa-Rodorick Thompson ran for 80 yards and a score for Texas Tech (7-6), which finished with a winning record for the first time since 2015. The Red Raiders were appearing in their first bowl game since 2017.

Mississippi State (7-6) fell short in coach Mike Leach’s first game against a former program of his. Leach, who went 84-43 at

Texas Tech from 2000-09, was attempting to become the first Bulldogs coach to end each of his first two seasons with a bowl victory.

Guaranteed Rate Bowl

Minnesota 18, West Virginia 6: At Phoenix, Ky Thomas ran for 144 yards and a touchdown, Mar’Kiese Irving added 129 yards rushing and the Gophers shut down the Mountaineers.

Thomas and Irving became Minnesota’s 1-2 punch after Mohamed Ibrahim and Trey Potts sustained season-ending injuries. The two running backs carried most of the load offensively against West Virginia (6-7), accounting for 273 of the Gophers’ 358 total yards.

Minnesota (9-4) overwhelmed the Mountaineers defensively, holding them to 206 total yards to win their fifth straight bowl game, third under coach P.J. Fleck.

Bolts go to overtime, defeat Canadiens in return

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Ondrej Palat scored 36 seconds into overtime after Tampa Bay teammate Corey Perry tied it late in the third period, and the Lightning beat the Montreal Canadiens 5-4 on Tuesday night in the first NHL game following an extended holiday break.

Perry got the equalizer with 19.7 seconds left in regulation and the Lightning net empty before Palat won it off a pass from Victor Hedman.

It was the first NHL game since Tampa Bay won 4-3 at Vegas on Dec. 21. Dozens of games were postponed over the past week-plus as the league turned a Christmas break scheduled to last three days into a six-day hiatus because of COVID-19 outbreaks and protocols.

The Lightning had six players and coach Jon Cooper unavailable in COVID-19 protocols. The Canadiens had nine

players in protocols, including starting goalie Jake Allen.

Tampa Bay assistant coach Derek Lalonde filled in for Cooper for the second consecutive game.

David Savard ended a 49-game goal drought to put Montreal up 4-3 with 6:51 left in the third. Kale Clague had tied it at 3 for the team earlier in the third on his first NHL goal.

Lightning center Brayden Point had two goals and an assist in his return after missing 14 games with an upper-body injury.

Tampa Bay, which has a seven-game home winning streak and is 9-1-1 in its last 11 overall, also got a goal from Ross Colton. With goalies Andrei Vasilevskiy and Brian Elliott both out, Maxime Lagace made 27 saves in his first NHL game since May 8, with Pittsburgh.

Rafael Harvey-Pinard got a goal in his NHL debut for the

Canadiens, who have lost eight of nine (1-6-2). Lukas Vejdemo also scored, and Sam Montembeault turned aside 32 shots.

Golden Knights 6, Kings 3: Jonathan Marchessault had two goals and an assist in Vegas’ victory at Los Angeles.

Reilly Smith and Chandler Stephenson each added a goal and an assist as the Golden Knights returned from the extended Christmas break to push their road winning streak to six games. Keegan Kolesar and Mattias Janmark also scored, and Laurent Brossoit made 24 saves.

Vegas assistant Steve Spott ran the bench, with head coach Peter DeBoer in virus protocol.

Jonathan Quick was pulled early in the second period after allowing five goals on 15 shots for the Kings, who had not played since Dec. 19 after their past three games were postponed because of the NHL’s on-

going issues with COVID-19.

Anze Kopitar passed Wayne Gretzky for second place in career assists with Los Angeles. Adrian Kempe, Trevor Moore and Alex Iafallo scored for the Kings.

Sharks 8, Coyotes 7 (SO): Tomas Hertl came out of COVID-19 protocols and delivered twice for host San Jose in a shootout victory over Arizona.

Hertl scored his team-leading 15th goal and added a shootout goal for the Sharks, who played for the first time since Dec. 16.

Logan Couture had a goal and an assist and scored in the shootout, and Jeffrey Viel scored his first goal for San Jose, which had lost five of seven. James Reimer made 39 saves.

Nick Bonino, Radim Simek, Timo Meier and Alexander Barbanov also scored for the Sharks.

James, Westbrook help Lakers end skid

Associated Press

HOUSTON — LeBron James and Russell Westbrook both had triple-doubles and the Los Angeles Lakers snapped a season-high, five-game skid with a 132-123 victory over the Houston Rockets on Tuesday night.

James had 32 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his third triple-double this season. Westbrook scored 24 points with 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his seventh of the season.

Houston stuck around for most of the night, but James took over late to allow the Lakers to pull away and hand the Rockets their fifth consecutive loss.

Jalen Green, the second overall pick in this year's draft, led Houston with 24 points after missing 15 of the last 16 games with a strained left hamstring.

Nuggets 89, Warriors 86: Stephen Curry became the first player in NBA history to make 3,000 career three-pointers but visiting Denver held off NBA-leading Golden State.

The Nuggets' Nikola Jokic blocked a potential game-tying shot by Jonathan Kuminga in the final seconds to preserve the win after his team nearly blew a 24-point halftime lead. The Warriors got one more chance to tie the game, but Andre Iguodala missed a three-pointer at the buzzer.

Jokic had 22 points, 18 rebounds, five assists and four steals to lead Denver, while Will Barton added 21 points.

Andrew Wiggins had 21 points and eight rebounds for Golden State in his first game back from the league's COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Curry, who scored 21 of his 23 points in the second half, made a corner three-pointer late in the third quarter to give him 157 consecutive games with a three-point field goal. It ties his own NBA record, which he set from 2014-16.

Pelicans 108, Cavaliers 104: Garrett Temple nailed four three-pointers in a 3:50 span of the fourth quarter and rookie Herb Jones scored a career-high 26 points to lift host New Orleans over Cleveland.

The Cavaliers led by as many as 23 points in the first quarter but could not ward off a strong three quarters by the Pelicans.

Ricky Rubio had 27 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists for Cleveland before injuring his left knee on a non-contact stop in the lane with 2:20 left. Rubio had to be carried off the court by teammates.

Bucks 127, Magic 110: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 28 points, Bobby Portis scored 17 of his 19 points in the first half and Milwaukee won at Orlando.

The Bucks have won four in a row and five of their last seven. Since starting the season 6-8, they have gone 17-5 to surge back near the top of the Eastern Conference standings.

76ers 114, Raptors 109: Tobias Harris had 19 points, 12 rebounds, and 10 assists for his first career triple-double, Joel Embiid finished with 36 points and 11 rebounds, and

Philadelphia hung on to win at Toronto.

Georges Niang scored 19 points, Seth Curry had 12 and Furkan Korkmaz 10 as the 76ers won their second straight.

Chris Boucher scored a season-high 28 points and matched his career high with 19 rebounds, but the depleted Raptors lost their second straight.

Knicks 96, Timberwolves 88: Mitchell Robinson had 14 points and a season-high 18 rebounds, Julius Randle added 13 points and 15 boards, and visiting New York topped short-handed Minnesota.

Evan Fournier scored 13 points, while Quentin Grimes added 11 off the bench for the Knicks in their second straight win.

Heat 119, Wizards 112: Tyler Herro scored 32 points off the bench, Jimmy Butler finished with 25 points and a career-best 15 assists, and depleted Miami held off visiting Washington.

Duncan Robinson added 26 points for the Heat, making eight three-pointers on a night the team got by with an eight-man rotation that might be facing a new challenge after Butler twisted his right ankle with 1:03 remaining.

Kings 117, Thunder 111: Tyrese Haliburton had 24 points and 10 assists, and host Sacramento held off Oklahoma City.

Buddy Hield added 21 points off the bench for the Kings. Harrison Barnes scored 17 and De'Aaron Fox had 12 points and eight assists.

Akinjo, Baylor win big, push win streak to 18 games

Associated Press

WACO, Texas — James Akinjo scored a career-high 27 points and top-ranked Baylor extended the nation's longest winning streak to 18 in a row by beating Northwestern State 104-68 on Tuesday night.

The Bears (12-0) scored the game's first 13 points. Later in the first half, Akinjo started another 13-0 run with three consecutive three-pointers in a span of 64 seconds — his only made threes.

Adam Flagler added 21 points with five threes and had 11 assists for Baylor. Jeremy Sochan scored 16 points and had 11 rebounds in his first career start, and fellow freshman Kendall

Brown had 12 points with nine rebounds.

Carvell Teasett scored a career-high 18 points on six threes for Northwestern State (3-11), which has yet to defeat a Division I opponent this season.

The Bears scored more than 100 points for the first time this season and shot 50% from the field (39-for-78), even after missing their last 10 shots.

No. 4 Gonzaga 96, North Alabama 63: Julian Strawther scored 15 points, Rasir Bolton added 14 points, and the host Bulldogs beat the Lions to extend the nation's longest home winning streak to 59 games.

Nolan Hickman scored 13 points, Drew Timme had 12, and

Anton Watson had 10 points and 10 rebounds for Gonzaga (11-2), which wrapped up its nonconference schedule.

C.J. Brim scored 15 points for North Alabama (7-6).

This one was over early, despite North Alabama trailing 21-16 midway through the first half. After that, the Zags launched an 18-3 run, aided by five Lions turnovers, to take a 39-19 lead.

No. 17 Texas 78, Incarnate Word 33: Dylan Disu had 14 points, 11 rebounds and five blocks in his longest appearance of the season for the host Longhorns, who beat the Cardinals.

Disu played 20 minutes. He had missed the first eight games of the season while recovering

from knee surgery that he underwent while at Vanderbilt last season.

Tre Mitchell contributed 14 points, six rebounds and three steals for Texas (10-2).

No. 25 Texas Tech 75, Alabama State 53: Davion Warren scored 15 points, and the host Red Raiders rolled over the Hornets in their final tuneup before starting Big 12 play.

Texas Tech (10-2) was supposed to open Big 12 play on New Year's Day at home against Oklahoma State, but COVID-19 issues in the Cowboys' program postponed the game to Jan. 13. The conference opener is now Jan. 5 at No. 8 Iowa State.