

Many irked by package rejections overseas

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
AND KYLE ALVAREZ
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Postal Service screening of parcels meant for service members overseas is driving an overwhelming number of complaints from military families about weeks-long waits for holiday gifts, while other presents never arrive at all.

They have said they are confounded and frustrated by messages from major global retailers that their packages were returned or refunded with little or no explanation; meanwhile, family members are having their gifts and well-wishes returned to sender after multiple tries.

Military officials have said the increased screening is rejecting packages with vague descriptions on shipping labels, or those with older customs forms.

But customers have no control over whether giant retailers such as Amazon use simple descriptions like “toy” on their labels.

Meanwhile, family members in the United States who are sending mail ranging from books to underwear — with customs forms descriptions in scrupulous detail — have said they are seeing their packages returned to them, commenters in overseas-based military Facebook groups are saying.

The change close to the holidays has many people worried that presents won’t arrive in time for Christmas, Hanukkah and other celebrations.

“It’s definitely starting to feel like the Grinch is stealing Christmas with getting so

many packages rejected right before the holidays and companies now not wanting to mess with (Army or Air Force Post Office) addresses,” a comment last week on the U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart Facebook page said.

It’s unknown how many families have been affected, but numerous complaints have been made by people in U.S. military communities with tens of thousands of people each, including in Germany, the United Kingdom and Japan. Official military social media pages have warned their audiences in recent weeks that more packages are being returned.

James Clawson, a postal operations specialist for U.S. Army Europe and Africa, said in a statement to Stars and Stripes on Friday that in mid-October, the Chicago International Military Service Center began screening for military parcels that don’t meet global trade compliance rules.

The USPS still hasn’t responded to a Stars and Stripes query on Thursday to a government relations assistant, asking for an explanation of these export regulations and why they’re being enforced now.

Most military parcels go through Chicago, Clawson said, but some go to other locations, such as John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. All hubs screen military parcels under the same regulations, he said.

If the customs form is missing or dates from earlier than 2015, USPS will return the package to the sender, he said.

Vague descriptions of items or the pres-

ence of lithium batteries are other reasons an item can be returned, Clawson said in a statement.

Customers have said, however, that it’s anyone’s guess what level of description is sufficient. One member of the Kaiserslautern Military Community lamented that their father’s separate descriptions of a pajama shirt and pajama pants got returned to sender.

Another customer in Kaiserslautern marveled at the “household goods” description that got unicorn onesies through customs.

A Postal Service online document says only that it “requires electronic customs information on all mail items that bear a customs declaration” and that this applies to items mailed to overseas military and diplomatic post office addresses and nonmilitary U.S. possessions and territories, among other international locations. The information is dated October 2019.

The stricter screening practices are holding up packages with toys, T-shirts and household products. Customers are also reporting custom-order greeting cards from companies such as Shutterfly are getting sent back.

Yokota Air Base postal officials in Japan have said there have been problems with third-party vendors that sell products through retailers such as Amazon and Walmart. Customers should contact those vendors and request a customs form be attached to a parcel, Yokota officials said in a Facebook post recently.

N. Korea fires artillery rounds near southern border

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired about 130 artillery rounds on Monday into the water near its western and eastern sea borders with South Korea, the latest military action contributing to worsening relations between the neighbors.

North Korea’s military said the firings were a warning against ongoing South Korean artillery exercises near the inland border town of Cheorwon and blamed the South for worsening tensions.

South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North Korean weapons, fired Monday afternoon from North Korea’s western and eastern coastal areas, fell within the northern side of buffer zones created under a 2018 inter-Korean agreement to reduce military tensions. There were no immediate reports of shells falling inside South Korean territorial waters.

South Korea’s military said it communicated a verbal warning to North Korea over the firings and urged it to abide by

the agreement. The South Korean and U.S. militaries were closely monitoring North Korea’s military activities while strengthening their readiness to respond to any “potential contingency,” the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

The South Korean army is conducting live-fire exercises involving multiple rocket launching systems and howitzers from Monday to Wednesday in two separate testing grounds in the Cheorwon region.

Kuwait base steps up in wake of Iran drone threat

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

ALI AL SALEM AIR BASE, Kuwait — A sign warning troops about the aerial drones now used by U.S. rivals in the Middle East greets arrivals to this key American military transit hub in the Middle East.

“When you see a drone, call security forces immediately,” it says in all caps at the in-processing building. The base is adapting its air defenses after spending the last two decades sending U.S. forces into danger elsewhere.

The spread of aerial drone technology and advanced ballistic missiles throughout the region means that more places in the Middle East now live under threat.

“With how fast other countries are changing their tactics, we’re needing to change our systems a lot,” Lt. Col. Tito Ruiz, security forces commander for the 386th Air Expeditionary Wing, said in an interview last week.

Iran’s robust drone and missile systems have made an impact in wars in the Middle East and Ukraine, forcing the U.S. and its allies to bolster their air defense systems, analysts and military leaders have said.

Attacks by Iran and its proxies in the region include a missile strike in early 2022 claimed by Houthi rebels that targeted Al Dhafra Air Base, which hosts the U.S. Air Force’s 380th Air Expeditionary Wing.

Efforts to detect airborne threats more quickly led the wing at Ali Al Salem to com-

bine its command post and counter-drone teams, Ruiz said.

The U.S. military services created different systems to counter the specific drones they faced. These systems don’t communicate with each other well enough, Lt. Gen. Alexis Grynkewich told Stars and Stripes in July, adding that better coordination and technology are needed.

The Army’s systems tend to be better at finding smaller drones, while the Air Force’s sensors are better at detecting larger craft, said Col. Jeffrey “Mumbles” Smith, the wing’s director of intelligence and operations.

Wing leaders said they hope that having one combined building with the Army and the Air Force, as well as Kuwaiti liaisons who have their own systems, can cut down on potential communication breakdowns.

The wing also has an innovation cell to test out new ways of jamming drones and a “red team” to fly unmanned aerial aircraft around the base to test out its defenses, Smith said.

Outside the command post, the threat of aerial warfare is manifested in a new design for the bunkers made of Hesco barriers that are familiar to many veterans of the last 20 years of war in the Middle East. A \$2.4 million project at Ali Al Salem aims to renovate the base’s air raid bunkers, drawing lessons from a 2020 attack on U.S. troops in Iraq, Ruiz said.

US monitors skies in Qatar amid World Cup

Associated Press

AL-UDEID AIR BASE, Qatar — As World Cup fans throng stadiums across Qatar, about 8,000 American troops stationed just nearby watch over the airspace of the tumultuous Middle East from a major base run by this energy-rich nation.

Built on a flat stretch of desert about 20 miles southwest of Qatari capital Doha, Al-Udeid Air Base was once considered so sensitive that American military officers identified it as only being somewhere “in southwest Asia.”

Today, the sprawling hub is Qatar’s strategic gem, showcasing the Gulf Arab emirate’s tight security partnership with the United States, which now considers Doha a major non-NATO ally.

“There is a tremendous commitment from the U.S. Air Force to this region,” U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Erin Brilla told the AP. “We are staying as an enduring capability.”

While the “forever wars” wound down, conflicts still rage across the region. As tensions with Iran run high, the U.S. and its allies are looking for ways to counter the low-cost drones employed in the region by Tehran and its militia allies, like Yemen’s Houthi rebels.

The Air Force’s new Task Force 99, newly stationed at Al-Udeid, is focused on countering them — or imposing the same “dilemmas” on militias that they do on the U.S. when they force allies to fire a “\$1 million missile versus a \$1,000 drone,” Brilla said.

That’s a real-world example. The Saudi military has fended off most of the Houthis’ barrages with its American-made Patriot surface-to-air missile system, typically firing two missiles at an incoming target. That has become expensive and inefficient, as each Patriot missile costs more than \$3 million and the kingdom’s supply has run low.

Task Force 99 follows a similar force in the U.S. Navy’s 5th Fleet, which dispatches drones into Mideast waters.

Like the Navy, the Air Force wants to focus on widely available off-the-shelf technology it could share with allied nations and not fret about losing, as opposed to the \$32 million MQ-9 Reaper drones that have flown out of Al-Udeid in the past.

Operation Christmas Drop is back

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

ANDERSEN AIR FORCE BASE, Guam — The Defense Department’s longest-running humanitarian aid mission swung into high gear again Monday after two years of a slimmed down, COVID-19 pandemic version.

Representatives from six nations gathered for a “push off” ceremony for the 71st annual Operation Christmas Drop, a weeklong mission to air drop essential supplies to far flung and isolated islands of the Federated States

of Micronesia and Republic of Palau.

From Andersen, participating airlifters will fly an expanse of ocean equal in size to the continental United States.

The group this year includes the 374th Airlift Wing from Yokota Air Base, the 36th Wing at Andersen and the 15th Wing from Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. Partner nations are the Japan Air Self-Defense Force, Royal Australian Air Force, Royal New Zealand Air Force and the South Korean and Indian air forces, according to a Pacific Air Forces news release.

Police rarely use robots to confront suspects

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The unabashedly liberal city of San Francisco became the unlikely proponent of weaponized police robots last week after supervisors approved limited use of the remote-controlled devices, addressing head-on an evolving technology that has become more widely available even if it is rarely deployed to confront suspects.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted 8-3 on Tuesday to permit police to use robots armed with explosives in extreme situations where lives are at stake and no other alternative is available. The authorization comes as police departments across the Unit-

ed States face increasing scrutiny for the use of militarized equipment and force amid a yearslong reckoning on criminal justice.

The vote was prompted by a new California law requiring police to inventory military-grade equipment such as flashbang grenades, assault rifles and armored vehicles, and seek approval from the public for their use.

So far, police in just two California cities — San Francisco and Oakland — have publicly discussed the use of robots as part of that process. Around the country, police have used robots over the past decade to communicate with barricaded suspects, enter potentially dangerous spaces and, in

rare cases, for deadly force.

Dallas police became the first to kill a suspect with a robot in 2016, when they used one to detonate explosives during a standoff with a sniper who had killed five police officers and injured nine others.

The recent San Francisco vote has renewed a fierce debate sparked years ago over the ethics of using robots to kill a suspect and the doors such policies might open. Largely, experts have said, the use of such robots remains rare even as the technology advances.

Michael White, a professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State

University, said even if robotics companies present deadlier options at trade shows, it doesn't mean police departments will buy them. White said companies made specialized claymores to end barricades and they scrambled to equip body-worn cameras with facial recognition software, but departments didn't want them.

"Because communities didn't support that level of surveillance. It's hard to say what will happen in the future, but I think weaponized robots very well could be the next thing that departments don't want because communities are saying they don't want them," White said.

NC power outages could last days after shootings

AP/Report For America

CARTHAGE, N.C. — Two power substations in a North Carolina county were struck by gunfire in what is being investigated as a criminal act, causing damage that could take days to repair and leaving tens of thousands of people without electricity, authorities said.

In response to ongoing outages, which began just after 7 p.m. Saturday across Moore County, officials announced a state of emergency that included a curfew from 9 p.m. Sunday to 5 a.m. Monday. County schools were also closed Monday.

"An attack like this on critical infrastructure is a serious, intentional crime and I expect state and federal authorities to thoroughly investigate and bring those responsible to justice," Gov. Roy Cooper wrote on Twitter.

Moore County Sheriff Ronnie Fields said at a Sunday news conference that authorities have not determined a motivation. He said someone pulled up and "opened fire on the substation, the same thing with the other one." The

sheriff said that it appeared gates were breached at both sites. The Pilot newspaper in Southern Pines reported that a wooden post holding up a gate had been snapped at one of the substations and that it was lying in an access road Sunday morning.

"No group has stepped up to acknowledge or accept that they're the ones that done it," Fields said, adding "we're looking at all avenues."

The sheriff noted that the FBI was working with state investigators to determine who was responsible. He also said "it was targeted."

"It wasn't random," Fields said.

Fields said law enforcement is providing security at the substations and for businesses overnight.

"We will have folks out there tonight around the clock," Fields said.

Roughly 35,400 electric customers in the county were without power on Monday morning, down by several thousand from the peak of the outages, according to poweroutage.us.

FDA change makes hearing aids cheaper, easier to obtain

Associated Press

It's now a lot easier — and cheaper — for many hard-of-hearing Americans to get help.

Hearing aids can now be sold without a prescription from a specialist. Over-the-counter hearing aids started hitting the market in October at prices that can be thousands of dollars lower than prescription hearing aids.

About 30 million people in the United States deal with hearing loss, according to the Food and Drug Administration. But only about 20% of those who could use a hearing aid seek help.

The FDA approved OTC hearing aids for adults with mild-to-moderate hearing loss. That can include people who have trouble hearing phone calls or who turn up the TV volume loud enough that others complain.

It also can include people who have trouble understanding group conversations in noisy places.

OTC hearing aids aren't intended for people with deeper hearing loss, which may include those who have trouble hearing louder noises, like power tools and cars. They also aren't for peo-

ple who lost their hearing suddenly or in just one ear, according to Sterling Sheffield, an audiologist who teaches at the University of Florida. Those people need to see a doctor.

Before over-the-counter, you usually needed to get your hearing tested and buy hearing aids from a specialist. That's no longer the case.

But it can be hard for people to gauge their own hearing. You can still opt to see a specialist just for that test, which is often covered by insurance, and then buy the aids on your own. Check your coverage before making an appointment.

Walgreens drugstores are selling Lexie Lumen hearing aids nationwide for \$799. Walmart offers OTC hearing aids ranging from about \$200 to \$1,000 per pair. Its health centers will provide hearing tests.

The consumer electronics chain Best Buy has OTC hearing aids available online and in nearly 300 stores. The company also offers an online hearing assessment, and store employees are trained on the stages of hearing loss and how to fit the devices.

Russia unleashes missiles but Ukraine says most shot down

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia on Monday unleashed what Ukrainian authorities called the latest “massive missile attack” across their country, striking homes and buildings, killing civilians, and disrupting electrical power and water supplies in areas — notably in the Black Sea port city of Odesa. Ukraine’s air force claimed it shot down more than 60 of the 70 missiles fired.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, meanwhile, drove a car across a bridge linking his country to the Crimean Peninsula following its repair from a truck bombing in October that had embarrassed Moscow.

Russia responded to the bridge attack by firing waves of missiles at Ukrainian infrastructure targets in the weeks that followed, and Monday’s onslaught was just the latest round of retaliatory strikes.

The onslaught of attacks also came hours after Russian media reported two explosions at air bases inside Russia. The Russian Defense Ministry said it shot down Ukrainian drones that attacked two Russian air bases early Monday, and that

three Russian servicemen were killed by debris in the assaults.

Four other Russian servicemen were wounded by fragments of the drones that were intercepted at the bases in the Saratov and Ryazan regions, the Defense Ministry said in Moscow.

Ukraine has not commented on the possible cause of the blasts at the bases.

Defiant as ever, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy praised his military forces and the technicians who snapped into action to repair the damage.

“Air defense shot down most of the missiles,” he said in brief comments on social media. “Power engineers have already started to restore electricity. Our people never give up.”

Ukraine’s air force said early indications showed Russian forces fired 38 cruise missiles from carriers in the Caspian Sea and from the southern Russian region of Rostov. Another 22 Kalibr cruise missiles were fired from its Black Sea fleet, and long-range bombers, fighter jets and guided missiles were also involved, it said.

“In total, more than 60 invaders’ missiles were shot down!” the air force said on its Telegram channel.

Ukraine’s electricity provider, Ukrenergo, lashed out at Russia over “the eighth massive missile attack by a terrorist country,” saying its facilities had been hit, triggering blackouts. It urged residents to stay in shelters as its crews tried to repair the damage.

In the capital of Kyiv, scores of people quickly filled the central Zoloti Vorota metro station after the warnings, and many checked their phones for updates.

Air raid sirens sounded across the country. Ukrainian media reported explosions in several parts of the country south of Kyiv, including Cherkasy, Kryvyi Rih and Odesa. Officials said water, electricity and central heating was cut to many parts of Odesa.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, the deputy head of the Ukrainian president’s office, said two people were killed and three others injured in the village of Novosofiyivka in the southern Zaporizhzhya region.

Brussels bombings trial begins

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — More than six years after the deadliest peacetime attack on Belgian soil, the trial of 10 men accused over the suicide bombings at Brussels airport and a subway station started in earnest under high security on Monday.

Among the accused is Salah Abdeslam, the only survivor among the Islamic State extremists who in 2015 struck the Bataclan theater in Paris, city cafes and France’s national stadium.

He was brought to the court in an armored police vehicle and identified himself when called upon by the presiding judge.

The 10 defendants face charges including murder, attempted murder and membership in, or participation in the acts of, a terrorist group, over the morning rush hour attacks at Belgium’s main airport and on the central commuter line on March 22, 2016.

In all, 32 people were killed. Around 900 people were hurt or suffered mental trauma. If convicted, some of the accused could face up to 30 years in prison.

The trial was initially expected to start in October but was pushed back to allow changes to the seating arrangements for the defendants.

More than 300 witnesses could be questioned during the hearings, which are being held at a court located at the former headquarters of NATO on the outskirts of the Belgian capital and are expected to run for six to nine months.

Most of the first week is expected to be taken up with legal formalities and a public reading of the indictment and charges, a document around 500 pages long.

Turkish inflation eases for 1st time since '21

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Annual inflation in Turkey slightly eased in November for the first time in more than a year, according to official figures released on Monday, although it remains close to 24-year highs.

Consumer prices for the year rose by 84.39% in November, down from 85.51% recorded in October, the Turkish Statistical Institute announced. The monthly inflation rate was 2.88% in November, compared with 3.51% in the previous month.

It is the first time that annual inflation has eased since May 2021.

“As we have previously stated through various media, we have left the peak in inflation behind us and entered a downward trend — unless there is

an unexpected global development,” Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati tweeted on Monday.

While the pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine have stoked inflation around the world, economists believe that inflation in Turkey was additionally fueled by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s belief that high borrowing costs lead to higher prices. Traditional thinking says that raising rates helps rein in inflation.

Turkey’s central bank has slashed interest rates by 5 percentage points since August, down to 9% despite high inflation that has deepened a cost-of-living crisis in the country. In contrast, central banks around the world have been raising rates to fight soaring inflation.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Family: Coyote attacked toddler outside home

CA LOS ANGELES — A coyote ambushed and injured a 2-year old girl outside her Los Angeles home in a daytime attack before her father chased the animal off, her family said.

Home security video obtained by KTLA-TV shows the animal grab and drag the toddler across her lawn and sidewalk, just seconds after her father took her out of a car seat, set her down and turned back inside the vehicle to gather her toys. They had just arrived home from her preschool.

He heard the girl screaming on the other side of the SUV, then realized she was being attacked by what appeared to be a coyote. The father, Ariel Eliyahu, shouted and charged at the animal, causing it to release the girl, pause briefly a short distance away, then scamper off.

The girl suffered scratches and bruises and was treated at an emergency room, where she received the rabies vaccine.

Police chief on leave for traffic stop in golf cart

FL TAMPA — The police chief of Tampa was placed on leave after a video emerged of her flashing her badge from the passenger seat of a golf cart to get out of a traffic ticket.

Tampa Mayor Jane Castor placed Chief Mary O'Connor on administrative leave pending an investigation of the Nov. 12 traffic stop in Oldsmar, a city northwest of Tampa.

The body camera video, posted online by the Tampa Police Department, shows O'Connor's husband driving the cart and the

chief in the passenger seat when a Pinellas County sheriff's deputy pulls them over for not having a tag.

In a statement, O'Connor said it was "poor judgment" for them to have taken the cart out on public roads without a tag. She said it was the first time they had driven it outside of a golf cart-friendly community where they own property.

Ripley's Believe It Or Not museum closing soon

NJ ATLANTIC CITY — Believe it or not, an iconic part of the Atlantic City Boardwalk is closing soon.

The Ripley's Believe It Or Not! museum said it will close Dec. 31 after more than 26 years of tempting Boardwalk strollers with oddities including shrunken heads, mutant animals and models of unbelievably tall or small humans.

The building that houses the museum is an instantly recognizable feature of the Boardwalk. It is designed with a giant globe that appears to have smashed into the front of the building and wedged part of the way inside it, cracking the foundation from top to bottom. (The actual foundation of the building remains intact.)

Chris Connelly, the museum's manager, said the museum is closing because its local franchisee is reaching the end of its agreement with Ripley's.

Sig Sauer lawsuit says gun goes off by itself

NH CONCORD — Police and federal law enforcement officers are among 20 people from multiple states saying they were wounded by a popular type of Sig Sauer pistol,

with the latest lawsuit alleging that the gun is susceptible to going off without the trigger being pulled.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. federal court in Concord, says there have been over 100 incidents of the P320 pistol unintentionally discharging when the user believed they did not pull the trigger.

Robert Zimmerman, an attorney representing the group of 20 and about a dozen spouses, said it is the largest P320 lawsuit against the New Hampshire-based gunmaker on behalf of people who were injured.

Fan buying 'Goonies' house listed for \$1.7M

OR ASTORIA — The listing agent for the Victorian home featured in the "The Goonies" film in Astoria said that the likely new owner is a fan of the classic coming-of-age movie about friendships and treasure hunting, and he has promised to preserve and protect the landmark.

The 1896 home with sweeping views of the Columbia River flowing into the Pacific Ocean was listed in November with an asking price of nearly \$1.7 million.

Jordan Miller of John L. Scott Real Estate said the sale is expected to close in mid January, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. The new owner, a self-described serial entrepreneur, will make his name known at that time, Miller said.

Man admits to 26-year Social Security fraud

MO ST. LOUIS — An eastern Missouri man admitted that he stole almost \$200,000 by collecting his

mother's Social Security benefits for 26 years after her death.

Reginald Bagley, 62, of Dellwood, pleaded guilty to a felony charge of stealing money belonging to the United States, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Eastern Missouri said in a news release.

Bagley did not report his mother's death on March 12, 1994, to the Social Security Administration. Instead, in 1998 he set up a bank account to have her benefits directly deposited. The bank statements were sent to his address, with the name of either Bagley or his mother on them, prosecutors said.

The scheme unraveled when the Social Security Administration tried to contact Bagley's mother because she was not using her Medicare benefits.

City seeking hands-on leader in rodent fight

NY NEW YORK — Mayor Eric Adams' administration posted a job listing seeking someone to lead the city's long-running battle against rats. The official job title is "director of rodent mitigation," although it was promptly dubbed the rat czar. The salary range is \$120,000 to \$170,000.

New York City leaders have been trying to control the rodent population for generations, with mixed results. Sightings of rats around the city have recently increased.

City rats have survived a multimillion-dollar effort under former Mayor Bill de Blasio that focused on more trash pickups and better housing inspections in targeted neighborhoods. The city also launched a program to use dry ice to suffocate rats in their hiding spots.

— From wire reports

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Burrow rallies Bengals past Chiefs in rematch

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Joe Burrow got a huge assist from his defense in another riveting duel with Patrick Mahomes.

With the Chiefs leading Burrow's Bengals 24-20 early in the fourth quarter on Sunday, Mahomes hooked up with Travis Kelce, who rumbled for a big gain. But while Bengals linebacker Germaine Pratt and other defenders were wrestling Kelce to the ground, Pratt forced the ball free and recovered the ensuing fumble.

Burrow took it from there,

completing six of seven passes during a 53-yard drive that he finished with a go-ahead 8-yard touchdown to backup running back Chris Evans. The Bengals' defense held Kansas City scoreless from there and Burrow closed out a 27-24 victory over the Chiefs.

"He's playing at an MVP level — absolutely," Bengals coach Zac Taylor said. "He gives us a lot of confidence."

The Bengals (8-4) have won four straight overall and their last three meetings with Kansas City (9-3) — all in the same calen-

dar year. Cincinnati won on Jan. 2 to clinch the AFC North title. Four weeks later, the Bengals beat the Chiefs at Arrowhead Stadium in overtime — also by a 27-24 score — to reach the Super Bowl for the first time in 33 years.

This time, Burrow finished 25-for-31 with two touchdowns and ran in for a 4-yard score to get the Bengals on the board in the first quarter. He concluded his day by converting two third downs on passes to Ja'Marr Chase and Tee Higgins, allowing the Bengals to run out the clock.

"We left some points on the

field, but we still find a way to win," Burrow said. "We've still got five weeks left. Let's keep this train rolling. This team knows what it takes to win these games. We've been there. It's December. It's time to separate ourselves."

Mahomes was 16-for-27 for 223 yards and a touchdown and ran for another score. But the Chiefs fell short on their final possession when Joseph Ossai sacked Mahomes on third-and-3 from the Bengals 33, and Harrison Butker missed a 55-yard field goal wide right.

Eagles top Titans with Hurts' passing, Brown's running

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — A.J. Brown pulled out a towel and wagged his finger at the goal post before he swatted the structure three times. The hard feelings didn't last. Brown hugged the goal post and let bygones be bygones.

In case the allegory was missed during Brown's celebration for the Philadelphia Eagles against his former team, the goal post in this instance stood in for the Tennessee Titans.

"Today, I'm going to have to give you this whooping," Brown said with a laugh. "But I still love you, though."

The Titans might not reciprocate the love after their former receiver torched them with eight catches for 119 yards and two touchdowns on Sunday. Looking Brown's way early and often, Jalen Hurts strengthened his MVP bid by throwing for 380 yards and three touchdowns and running for another score as Philadelphia beat Tennessee 35-10.

Hurts has led the Eagles to an 11-1 start, their first time with that record since 2004 and the fourth time in franchise history. The 1949 Eagles won the NFL championship. The 1980 and 2004 teams lost in the Super Bowl.

The Eagles look every bit like a team that can win the Super Bowl.

Hurts was all they really needed to inch closer to a playoff spot.

"We'll leave all the MVP stuff to who votes for all that," Brown said. "But he's doing a great job leading this team. He's a great leader. He's still climbing. He wants the team to be great."

The speedy, sure-armed QB set a career high with 29 total touchdowns and had his third career game with four total TDs. His first half alone was a pretty good game for most quarterbacks: 268 yards passing and two touchdowns with one rushing score.

The Eagles' defense was first-rate, too, bottling up Derrick Henry — who had 11 carries for 30 yards — and limiting Ryan Tannehill to 141 yards passing and a touchdown. He was sacked six times. The Titans (7-5) lost their second straight but still have a comfortable lead in the AFC South.

49ers 33, Dolphins 17: Rookie Brock Purdy threw two touchdown passes after replacing Jimmy Garoppolo — who suffered a broken left foot that will end his season — and host San Francisco used another dominant defensive performance to beat Miami for its fifth straight win.

The 49ers (8-4) allowed a 75-yard touchdown pass to Trent Sherfield on the opening play from scrimmage but little else until the fourth quarter against a high-powered attack for Miami (8-4) that had scored at least 30 points in four straight games.

Commanders 20, Giants 20 (OT): Graham Gano came up well short on a 58-yard field-goal attempt on the last play of overtime, and host New York and Washington tied.

Taylor Heinicke threw two touchdown passes for Washington and converted a crucial fourth-down pass during a tying 90-yard touchdown drive late in the fourth quarter.

Browns 27, Texans 14: Deshaun Watson had a sloppy performance in his first game in 700 days, but a punt return for a touchdown

by Donovan Peoples-Jones and two defensive TDs were enough for visiting Cleveland to beat lowly Houston.

In the same stadium where he played his previous game, a rusty Watson threw for 131 yards with an interception in his debut for the Browns (5-7) against his former team in his return after serving an 11-game NFL suspension for sexual misconduct allegations.

Ravens 10, Broncos 9: Tyler Huntley capped a 91-yard drive with a 2-yard touchdown run with 28 seconds remaining, and host Baltimore overcame Lamar Jackson's injury to beat Denver.

Packers 28, Bears 19: Aaron Rodgers led three fourth-quarter scoring drives, receiver Christian Watson took an end-around 46 yards for a touchdown in the closing minutes and visiting Green Bay rallied to beat Chicago.

Seahawks 27, Rams 23: DK Metcalf caught an 8-yard touchdown pass from Geno Smith with 36 seconds to play, and visiting Seattle overcame an inspired performance by Bobby Wagner to beat spiraling Los Angeles.

Raiders 27, Chargers 20: Derek Carr completed two long touchdown passes to Davante Adams in the third quarter to rally host Las Vegas past Los Angeles.

Lions 40, Jaguars 14: Jamaal Williams ran for his 14th touchdown this season and host Detroit routed Jacksonville.

Steelers 19, Falcons 16: Kenny Pickett tossed a 17-yard touchdown pass to Connor Heyward, Matthew Wright kicked four field goals and visiting Pittsburgh held off Atlanta.

Wild blow 4-goal lead, top Stars in SO

Associated Press

DALLAS — Mats Zuccarello, Kirill Kaprizov and Frederick Gaudreau scored on Minnesota's three shootout attempts and the Wild beat the Dallas Stars 6-5 on Sunday after blowing a four-goal lead in the third period.

Coming off a 5-4 shootout victory over Anaheim on Saturday, Minnesota ran its winning streak to four.

"This one feels good," Gaudreau said. "We kept our calm."

Roope Hintz had his second career hat trick for the Stars, who earned points for the 10th time in 11 games.

Jason Robertson and Joe Pavelski scored to open the shootout, but Hintz's backhand rolled just short of the goal line, giving Gaudreau the chance to end it.

Hintz's final goal, with an extra skater on, tied it at 5 with 2:11 left in regulation.

"They pushed, we gave up the big lead," Wild coach Dean Evason said. "But did we quit? Did we shut it down? Did we stop playing? No. They just kept going about their business."

Kaprizov, Joel Ericksson Ek, Connor Dewar, Jake Middleton and Jordan Greenway scored for the Wild in regulation, and Marc-Andre Fleury made 30 saves.

Robertson had his NHL-best 23rd goal

and an assist to push his team-record points streak to 18 games.

Mason Marchment also had a goal and an assist for the Stars. Hintz also had an assist.

"We knew if we got one, we were going to get more," said Hintz, whose previous hat trick came in November 2021. "It's good we got one point."

Minnesota used a three-goal burst in a 2:50-span of the second period to take a 4-1 lead and made it 5-1 29 seconds into the third after Dallas goalie Jake Oettinger was replaced by Scott Wedgewood.

Dewar opened the second-period flurry with a short-handed goal and Middleton and Greenway also connected.

Oettinger, a Minnesota native, allowed four goals on 16 shots. Wedgewood made 14 saves in 20 minutes.

Islanders 3, Blackhawks 0: Semyon Varlamov made 21 saves and Matt Martin, Zach Parise and Brock Nelson scored second-period goals in host New York's victory over Chicago.

The Islanders snapped a two-game losing streak to improve to 9-4-0 at home.

The Blackhawks ended an eight-game losing streak Friday night, beating the New York Rangers 5-2.

Jets 5, Ducks 2: Morgan Barron and Mark Scheifele scored a pair of quick goals

in the third period and host Winnipeg beat Anaheim.

Barron scored with 6:37 left for a 3-2 lead. Scheifele followed up with his team-leading 13th goal with 4:48 to go.

Saku Maenalanen and Nate Schmidt each had a goal and assist for the Jets, Dylan Samberg scored his first NHL goal and Connor Hellebuyck made 28 saves. Winnipeg is 2-1-0 in a four-game homestand.

Sabres 6, Sharks 3: Jack Quinn scored twice to help host Buffalo beat San Jose.

Tage Thompson, JJ Peterka, Jeff Skinner and Alex Tuch also scored for Buffalo, and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 26 saves. The Sabres scored three times in the second period to take control.

Nick Bonino, Kevin Labanc and Oskar Lindblom scored for the Sharks, who have lost three in a row.

Red Wings 4, Blue Jackets 2: Dominik Kubalik and Lucas Raymond scored power-play goals and visiting Detroit beat Columbus to end a three-game losing streak.

Austin Czarnik and Andrew Copp also scored, Filip Hronek, David Perron and Olli Maatta each had two assists and Ville Husso stopped 30 shots.

Marcus Bjork and Kent Johnson scored for Columbus, which has lost four straight at home.

Croatia beats Japan in World Cup penalty shootout

Associated Press

AL WAKRAH, Qatar — Croatia is going deep at another World Cup, and the team is taking the long route once again.

Goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic saved three penalty kicks Monday in Croatia's 3-1 win over Japan in a shootout, securing a return to the quarterfinals for the runner-up in the 2018 tournament.

On its run to the final four years ago, Croatia needed extra time in each round in the knockout stage — and twice came through a penalty shootout.

"We in Croatia do things this way, you could see that four years ago as well," said Livakovic, who was the back-up goalkeeper to Danijel Subasic in 2018. "I continued the tradition."

This time, Mario Pasalic converted the clinching penalty for Croatia after the teams were tied at 1-1 after extra time.

After the ball hit the net, Pasalic and the rest of Croatia's jubilant players headed

right for Livakovic, who had saved penalties from Takumi Minamino, Kaoru Mitomo and Maya Yoshida.

While Croatia — a semifinalist in 1998 — prepares to take on Brazil or South Korea in the quarterfinals, Japan exits a World Cup in the round of 16 for the fourth time, just like in 2002, 2010 and 2018. The Asian team also lost in a penalty shootout to Paraguay at that stage in 2010.

Asia is still waiting for a second team to advance beyond the last 16, after South Korea on home soil in 2002.

Japan made its mark in Qatar, though, having beaten Germany and Spain — two of the last three World Cup champions — in huge upsets in the group stage.

"The players showed a new era of Japanese football, I think," Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said. "They should use this feeling of being upset and try to go further next time."

"We cannot be superheroes in one go. We

have to improve step by step. But Japan is reaching a level where we can play on the world stage."

In an even 90 minutes of regulation play, striker Daizen Maeda put Japan ahead in the 43rd minute by sweeping in a close-range finish after Yoshida had inadvertently deflected the ball across the front of goal following a cross into the area.

Ivan Perisic equalized by meeting Dejan Lovren's cross from the right with a header into the bottom corner from near the penalty spot in the 57th.

The result guarantees at least one more World Cup game for 37-year-old Croatia captain Luka Modric, one of the best midfielders of his generation. Modric was substituted in the first half of extra time.

Since 1998, all of Croatia's knockout matches at a World Cup or European Championship have gone to extra time except for the 2018 World Cup final loss to France. the 2018 World Cup final loss to France.

Lakers top Wizards; Davis scores 55

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Anthony Davis dazzled so much, he heard fans chanting “MVP!” And that came while playing on the road.

Davis scored 55 points on sizzling 22-for-30 shooting and added 17 rebounds, leading the Los Angeles Lakers over the Washington Wizards 130-119 Sunday night.

After scoring 44 points against Milwaukee in his previous game, Davis came close to his career-high of 59 against Detroit in 2016. He’s averaging 35.3 points in his last nine games.

“Coming off a huge win in Milwaukee, can’t get complacent, get comfortable,” Davis said.

Davis was 2-for-3 on three-pointers and made all nine of his foul shots. He scored 31 points in the second half.

LeBron James had 29 points as the Lakers won their fourth straight road game. They are 8-2 in their last 10 games while trying to extricate themselves from a 2-10 start.

Suns 133, Spurs 95: Deandre Ayton had 25 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Phoenix handed overwhelmed San Antonio its 11th straight loss.

Devin Booker and Mikal Bridges each had 20 points as Phoenix won for the seventh time in eight games.

Keldon Johnson had 27 points for the

Spurs, who have not won since Nov. 11.

San Antonio fell behind by 30 points in the second quarter and is now two losses shy of the franchise’s worst skid set in 1989.

Kings 110, Bulls 101: Malik Monk scored 20 points off the bench and host Sacramento overcame Zach LaVine’s 41 points to beat Chicago.

Domantas Sabonis had 11 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists for the Kings.

Nikola Vucevic had 12 points and Patrick Williams finished with 10 for Chicago.

Knicks 92, Cavaliers 81: Jalen Brunson scored 23 points and New York snapped a five-game home losing streak with a win over Cleveland.

The Knicks never trailed in the contest as they held an opponent under 100 points for the first time this season.

Julius Randle scored 18 points and RJ Barrett added 15 as New York held the Cavaliers to a season-low point total and field goal percentage of 34.9%.

Pelicans 121, Nuggets 106: Jose Alvarado highlighted a crowd-stirring, career-high 38-point performance with a career-best eight three-pointers to lead host New Orleans over Denver for the its fourth straight win.

Zion Williamson scored 25 points for the Pelicans. Jonas Valanciunas added 13 points

despite being limited to less than 14 minutes by foul trouble. Willy Hernangomez, who played nearly 20 minutes in place of Valanciunas, responded with 12 points and eight rebounds.

Grizzlies 122, Pistons 112: Ja Morant scored 21 of his 33 points in the third quarter in visiting Memphis’ victory over Detroit.

Morant added 10 assists to help Memphis win for the fourth time in five games. Dillon Brooks and Jaren Jackson Jr. each scored 22 points, and Brandon Clarke had 14 points and 14 rebounds.

Celtics 103, Nets 92: Jaylen Brown had 34 points and 10 rebounds, Jayson Tatum added 29 points and 11 boards and visiting Boston snapped Brooklyn’s four-game winning streak.

Kevin Durant scored 31 points for the Nets, but committed eight turnovers. Kyrie Irving added 18 points and eight rebounds, but shot just 7-for-21 from the field.

Trail Blazers 116, Pacers 100: Jerami Grant scored 28 points in host Portland’s victory over Indiana.

Blazers star Damian Lillard scored 21 points and dished six assists in his first game since returning from a calf strain he suffered on Nov. 19. Anfernee Simons had 22 points and six assists on the night, while Jusuf Nurkic had 19 points and six rebounds.

Virginia Tech hands North Carolina fourth straight loss

Associated Press

BLACKSBURG, Va. — Justin Mutts scored 27 points to lead Virginia Tech to an 80-72 victory over No. 18 North Carolina on Sunday.

Mutts scored 21 of his points in the second half for the Hokies (8-1, 1-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), who built an 18-point, second-half lead and then held on to hand the slumping Tar Heels (5-4, 0-1) their fourth consecutive defeat.

North Carolina cut that lead to 67-64 on a layup by Caleb Love with 3:06 remaining, but Mutts answered with a basket 17 seconds later, and the Tar Heels got no closer.

“When it did get to three, we sat down and did the things that we’re supposed to do,” Virginia

Tech coach Mike Young said. “(There was) a level of toughness and a level of resolve when the heat’s on a little bit, and they withstood it. They did a nice job with it.”

The Associated Press’ preseason No. 1 team, North Carolina played without center Armando Bacot, who missed the game with a bruised shoulder. The ACC’s preseason player of the year had started 107 of 108 games in his career and was averaging 16.1 points and a team-best 11.1 rebounds.

No. 4 Arizona 81, California 68: Azuolas Tubelis and Umar Ballo combined for 42 points and 19 rebounds and the host Wildcats bounced back from their first loss by holding off the winless Golden Bears.

No. 5 Purdue 89, Minnesota 70: Zach Edey set career highs with 31 points and 22 rebounds, powering the host Boilermakers past the Gophers in the Big Ten opener for both teams.

Nebraska 63, No. 7 Creighton 53: Derrick Walker scored a career-high 22 points to help the Cornhuskers knock off the highest-ranked opponent they have beaten on the road since 1997.

No. 13 Tennessee 94, Alcorn State 40: Olivier Nkamhoua scored 20 points and the host Volunteers flexed their defensive muscles in a victory over the Braves.

No. 19 Kentucky 73, Michigan 69: Cason Wallace scored 14 points and Oscar Tshiebwé had a double-double to lead the

Wildcats over the Wolverines in a London showcase of two marquee American college sports teams.

Northwestern 70, No. 20 Michigan State 63: Boo Buie scored 20 points and the visiting Wildcats beat the Spartans in the Big Ten opener for both teams.

No. 21 UCLA 65, Oregon 56: Jaylen Clark and freshman Amari Bailey scored 14 points each and the host Bruins rallied in the final four minutes to hold off the Ducks for their fourth straight win.

No. 23 Iowa State 71, St. John’s 60: Jaren Holmes scored 14 points and Aljaz Kunc added 12 as the host Cyclones handed the Red Storm their first loss of the season.