

US back to aid elite forces in Somalia

The Washington Post

BALEDOGLE MILITARY AIR BASE, Somalia — The U.S. military is scrambling to make up for lost time in Somalia after President Joe Biden this spring reversed his predecessor's order to pull American soldiers out of the country and returned hundreds of them to the fight against one of al-Qaida's most powerful global affiliates.

The decision by President Donald Trump in the final weeks of his administration to withdraw the troops helped the militant al-Shabab movement grow in strength and size, hampered U.S. ability to provide operational intelligence and air support to Somali troops and delayed the construction of military facilities such as a clinic and training sites, U.S. and Somali officials said.

These officials described the costly and dangerous lengths to which U.S. forces went after the withdrawal order to keep supporting their Somali military partners: the Danab, or "Lightning," special forces brigade. U.S. troops, for instance, would rotate through the country for three or four weeks at a time, then leave for two before returning, with such frequent movements exposing American personnel to greater

risks, according to five U.S. service members.

Despite the official U.S. pullout, the Danab force continued to carry out operations, said commanders from both countries, pointing to its battlefield progress after nearly a decade of U.S.-funded training. U.S. and Somali officials said Danab is slowly helping to change the image of a military often viewed by civilians as bandits in uniforms.

"I felt like it was a real tribute to Danab that they were able to carry on the fight despite the almost abrupt withdrawal of U.S. military support," said one U.S. service member. He and five other U.S. service members spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

An operation in central Somalia in 2021 illustrated Danab's capacity to succeed even without U.S. boots on the ground. Acting on a tip from a resident, Danab soldiers say they arrested a man accused of kidnapping a French intelligence agent a decade ago and killed scores of insurgents. The soldiers also flabbergasted the local population in the town of Camaare during the seven-week operation by renting housing and

buying food instead of commandeering it, said 2nd Lt. Samir Salim Omar.

The success of this specially trained force in seizing territory from al-Shabab and capturing some of its commanders has been the result of hard-won changes in the Somali military that began before the U.S. withdrawal, according to a dozen interviews with Danab soldiers of various ranks at their training facility, headquarters in the capital, Mogadishu, and at the sites of several recent battles as well as with U.S. and Somali defense officials, military trainers, and civilians and other Somali military and militia forces.

The interviews also reveal the damage the pullout did to the campaign against al-Shabab. A senior U.S. defense officer said in an interview that he had no doubt that the troop pullout — coupled with political turmoil inside Somalia over delayed elections — strengthened the insurgency over the past few years.

"Al-Shabab increased in size, so did the physical size number of operators. Al-Shabab increased their cash flow — their resourcing went up. And al-Shabab also increased their physical presence, so they occupied more terrain," he said.

Pentagon ready to commit to new Africa strategy

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States has engaged in Africa for decades, though it needs a more modern approach to defending interests and allies there, the Defense Department said Thursday, particularly because China and Russia are expanding their reach into the world's second-largest continent.

That's the message that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin will bring to the U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit this week, a senior defense official told reporters at the Pentagon. The

event's main purpose is to implement a new American strategy jointly with Sub-Saharan Africa that aims to add long-term stability and deepen relations — especially in places where Russia and China are making inroads.

"This strategy reframes the region's importance to U.S. national security interests," the White House states in its 17-page U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa. "This strategy articulates a new vision for how and with whom we engage."

"The United States firmly believes that it's time to stop treating Africa as a subject of geo-

politics — and start treating it as the major geopolitical player it has become," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. "The United States knows that, on most of the urgent challenges and opportunities we face, Africa will make the difference."

The summit opens Tuesday and will run through Thursday. It's being hosted in Washington.

On Thursday, the Pentagon stressed the importance of the meetings and their focus on issues such as defense, climate change, economic growth and ongoing coronavirus recovery.

A senior defense official told reporters that the Pentagon is taking a "3D approach" to the summit — defense, development and diplomacy — during this time of heightened conflict in the world and rising influence and aggression from Russia and China, countries that the U.S. views as two of its top challengers.

"Our focus is to make sure we work with partners so they understand challenges when they work with strategic partners," said the defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. "We respect African sovereignty."

Camp Lejeune Marines test stand-in force

By FRANK ANDREWS
Stars and Stripes

CENTRAL TRAINING AREA, Okinawa — Twilight came early beneath jungle canopy as two gargantuan CH-53E Super Stallions rattled overhead and onto a nearby landing zone during an exercise here Wednesday.

From the bush, 150 Marines of Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment from Camp Lejeune, N.C., laden with weaponry and supplies, filed aboard the heavy-lift helicopters for a 10-minute ride into the jungle near a simulated urban training site called combat town.

The training scenario tasked Alpha Company with reclaiming the town and a nearby dam that supplies hydroelectric power. The exercise tested the “stand-in force” concept laid out by Commandant Gen. David Berger in his Force Design 2030

as a means of fighting on islands in the Western Pacific.

“We’re a force-design battalion for the Marine Corps,” battalion commander Lt. Col. Aaron Awtry told Stars and Stripes before boarding a Super Stallion. “We’re conducting experiments based on what the Marine Corps is looking to make changes in its force structure.”

The North Carolina Marines are playing the title role over 10 days at dozens of sites across Okinawa and at the Marines’ Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji southwest of Tokyo.

A stand-in force, according to Berger’s Force Design 2030, is a tactical unit operating within range of an adversary’s long-range, precision weapons to inflict casualties, open the door for larger joint forces and generally undermine enemy operations.

“The force structure is a big deal,” Awtry said. “I’ve got dif-

ferent ranks in my squad leaders and platoon sergeants than most Marines do. The way our companies are organized and the additional capabilities we have in the battalion that other battalions don’t normally have, small [unmanned aerial systems]; and then some of our targeting and intelligence are a little bit different, so that’s new, and how we incorporate those into our operations is somewhat unique.”

On the outskirts of combat town, within the Central Training Area on Okinawa, the Marines split into three, 60-man platoons and moved through the jungle toward their objectives.

First and 3rd Platoons simultaneously flanked the town from the east and west sides, seized it and a command-and-control node while 2nd Platoon maneuvered to the west side of the dam and captured it.

“The mock takeover is tem-

plated as if the host nation’s town and dam were seized by an occupational force and now we’re infiltrating them, securing the dam and turning it back over to friendly forces,” 2nd Platoon commander 1st Lt. Michael Carreiro said moments before boarding a Super Stallion with his troops.

The exercise, which wraps Dec. 15, is the culminating event of the battalion’s six months on Okinawa. They’ll take what they learned home with them to Camp Lejeune in February.

“This is a demonstration of our capabilities and our commitment to conduct operations in support of our allies out here in the Indo-Pacific region,” Awtry said. “We’ve done exercises with all our partners since we’ve been on here, so just again, an example of our commitment to operate. We practice it, so we expect to be good at it when it happens.”

Tricare dropping children’s clinic to dismay of families

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — More than a hundred military families in Italy and Spain said they’ll have to start choosing between their children’s well-being and their financial stability after government insurer Tricare stripped a longtime pediatric clinic of its in-network status.

Joy Center, a U.S.-based clinic founded in Naples in 2010 that offers psychological, psychiatric, speech-language and occupational therapy for children and their families, will no longer be a Tricare in-network provider as of Sunday, clinic founder and supervisor Amy Zier told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

As a result, parents who want coverage for those services must switch to a different provider that now appears to be the only authorized similar clinic in Italy and Spain, based on a search of Tricare’s online list of in-network overseas providers.

That Italy-based provider, Reach Aut, was

founded by at least one former employee of Joy Center in 2020, Zier said. Reach Aut now has clinics in each of the same cities overseas as Joy Center.

Natallia Stiefel, who is married to an active-duty sailor, said the couple’s 6-year-old son has been receiving speech therapy at Joy Center near NSA Naples for nearly a year.

Stiefel was hoping to get approval from Tricare for an out-of-network referral to Joy Center, but the request was recently denied without explanation.

Their only other option is to change to another Tricare health care program. That would mean an out-of-pocket expense of about 20% of their son’s therapy costs, Stiefel said.

“His therapy isn’t cheap, so it becomes a financial strain to continue what we’ve been doing,” she said.

Zier and parents whose children were treated at Joy Center said the decision puts patients’ continuity of care at risk, potential-

ly undermining progress and development at a time when children are most vulnerable.

“I’m upset that Tricare would do this,” said Katlyn Cunningham, whose 5-year-old daughter has been receiving services at Joy Center near Naval Support Activity Naples since July. “That’s our kids. They are messing with our kids. They are messing with all these children, all of the services they need to thrive and ... be successful at life.”

Stiefel said she visited the other clinic and did not find it suitable.

“I feel at this point, if I don’t stay with Joy Center, it’s pretty much there’s not going to be any therapy (for my son),” she said.

Tricare offers health plans and other services for active-duty service members, retirees and their families. As of Friday, the insurer had not answered questions posed by Stars and Stripes last month and Wednesday seeking information about the change, the reasons behind it and the impact for patients.

US helo raid kills 2 ISIS militants in Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT — American forces on Sunday killed two Islamic State militants in eastern Syria in a helicopter raid, U.S. Central Command said in a statement.

ISIS sleeper cells continue to carry out deadly attacks in Syria and Iraq. For a few years, the group ruled swaths of both countries but lost its last stronghold in 2019. CENTCOM did not specify the location of the overnight operation, and claimed there were no civilian casualties in its initial as-

sessments of the operation.

The statement described one of the two targeted ISIS leaders, Anas, as an “ISIS Syria Province official” involved in plotting attacks in eastern Syria.

“ISIS continues to represent a threat to the security and stability of the region,” CENTCOM spokesman Joe Buccino said in the statement. “The death of these ISIS officials will disrupt the terrorist organization’s ability to further plot and carry out destabilizing attacks in the Middle

East.”

Kurdish forces also took part in the raid in the village of Al-Zer in eastern Deir el-Zour, said the U.K.-based war monitor group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. The militants refused to turn themselves in before U.S. helicopters fired at the house they were in, it added.

There are some 900 U.S. forces in Syria supporting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces in the fight against ISIS. They have frequently targeted ISIS mili-

tants mostly in parts of northeastern Syria under Kurdish control.

On Nov. 30, ISIS announced that leader Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi was killed in battle. The U.S. said al-Qurayshi was killed in an operation conducted by rebel forces in the southern city of Daraa.

U.S. troops and Kurdish fighters resumed joint patrols in northeastern Syria after a temporary halt following a series of Turkish airstrikes against Kurdish-led forces.

Report names 4 nations where China may seek military bases

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

China is most likely to establish its next overseas military base in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia or Myanmar, according to new a Rand Corp. report.

Researchers from the U.S.-based think tank assessed 108 countries as desirable and feasible sites for future Chinese bases and published their findings in a report: China’s Global Basing Ambitions. Rand posted a link to the report on Twitter on Thursday.

China has only one overseas military base — in Djibouti, on the Horn of Africa — but has gained leverage by loaning money for infrastructure projects in a number of countries where it might want to establish its forces.

Beijing’s motivation for expanding its military presence abroad is rooted in the desire to protect its own interests, particularly economic interests, according to a summary posted with the report on Rand’s website.

The report’s authors — Christina Garafola, Stephen Watts and Kristin Leuschner — identified two dozen countries especially well-suited to China’s pursuit of basing and access.

Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Myanmar all rated “high” for their desirability and

feasibility as sites for Chinese military facilities, the report states.

“If China gains rights for large-scale overseas military bases, historical cases suggest that it is most likely to be among countries facing acute security requirements that they cannot meet without foreign support,” the summary states.

The report suggests that nations with those requirements pose many risks to China, including loss of its bases because of domestic instability or getting drawn into unwanted conflicts.

The U.S. can do little to prevent competitors from obtaining military access and destabilization could result from contesting access too intensively, according to the report.

However, it suggests the United States may be able to take advantage of regional aversion to Chinese military expansion to develop new partnerships and access.

“New large-scale overseas military bases disrupt local balances of power and risk triggering both internal and interstate wars,” the report’s summary states. “In the longer-term future, China’s global basing ambitions might touch off peripheral wars with the potential to draw in China and the United States.”

Lockerbie bombing suspect in US custody, to be charged

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A Libyan intelligence official accused of making the bomb that brought down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 in an international act of terrorism has been taken into U.S. custody and will face federal charges in Washington, the Justice Department said Sunday.

The arrest of Abu Agela Masud Kheir Al-Marimi is a milestone in the decades-old investigation into the attack that killed 259 people in the air and 11 on the ground. American authorities in December 2020 announced charges against Masud, who was in Libyan custody at the time. Though he is the third Libyan intelligence official charged in the U.S. in connection with the attack, he would be the first to appear in an American courtroom for prosecution.

The New York-bound flight exploded over Lockerbie less than an hour after takeoff from London on Dec. 21, 1988. Citizens from 21 different countries were killed. Among the 190 Americans on board were 35 Syracuse University students returning for Christmas after a semester abroad.

The bombing laid bare the threat of international terrorism more than a decade before the Sept. 11 attacks. It produced global investigations and punishing

sanctions while spurring demands for accountability from victims of those killed. The university’s current chancellor, Kent Syverud, said in a statement that the arrest was a significant development in the long process “to bring those responsible for this despicable act to justice.”

The announcement of charges against Masud on Dec. 21, 2020, came on the 32nd anniversary of the bombing and in the final days of the tenure of then-Attorney General William Barr, who in his first stint as attorney general in the early 1990s had announced criminal charges against two other Libyan intelligence officials.

The Libyan government initially balked at turning over the two men, Abdel Baset Ali al-Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah, before ultimately surrendering them for prosecution before a panel of Scottish judges sitting in the Netherlands as part of a special arrangement.

The Justice Department said Masud would appear soon in a federal court in Washington, where he faces two criminal counts. U.S. officials did not say how Masud came to be taken into U.S. custody, but late last month, local Libyan media reported that Masud had been kidnapped by armed men on Nov. 16 from his residence in Tripoli.

Envoy provides Griner homecoming details

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — WNBA star Brittney Griner didn't want any alone time as soon as she boarded a U.S. government plane that would bring her home.

"I've been in prison for 10 months, listening to the Russians. I want to talk," Griner said, according to Roger Carstens, the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, who helped secure the basketball star's release and bring her back to the U.S. last week.

She walked throughout the plane, introducing herself to every member of the flight crew, shaking their hands, and "making a personal connection with

them," Carstens recalled.

Ultimately, Griner spent about 12 hours of an 18-hour flight talking with others on the plane, Carstens said.

The two-time Olympic gold medalist and Phoenix Mercury pro basketball star spoke about her time in the Russian penal colony and her months in captivity, Carstens recalled, although he declined to go into specific details.

"I was left with the impression this is an intelligent, passionate, compassionate, humble, interesting person, a patriotic person," Carstens said. "But above all, authentic. I hate the fact that I had to meet her in this manner, but I actually felt

blessed having had a chance to get to know her."

Although Griner is undergoing a full medical and mental evaluation, Carstens said she appeared "full of energy, looked fantastic."

Griner, who also played pro basketball in Russia, was arrested at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport in February after Russian authorities said she was carrying vape canisters with cannabis oil. The U.S. State Department declared Griner to be "wrongfully detained" — a charge that Russia has sharply rejected.

Carstens spoke on CNN's "State of the Union."

Tensions high in Kosovo as shots fired, Serbs block roads

Associated Press

PRISTINA, Kosovo — Tensions were high in northern Kosovo on Sunday, with Serbs blocking roads as shots and explosions rang out overnight, Kosovo police and media reported Sunday. No injuries were reported.

The blocking of the roads with heavy vehicles and trucks happened a day after the Serbian president said he would ask the NATO-led peacekeeping force in Kosovo to permit the deployment of 1,000 Serb troops in the Serb-populated north of Kosovo, claiming they are being harassed there.

The road blocks, which Serbs have said were erected to protest the recent arrest of a former Kosovo Serb police officer, came despite the postponement of the Dec. 18 municipal election the Kosovo Serbs were opposed to.

Serbia's president Aleksandar Vucic said Sunday that his message to the Serbs in Kosovo is that "there is no surrender and there will be no surrender." He claimed the Serbs had been "forced" to erect the road barricades to protect themselves from Kosovo security forces.

The European Union rule of law mission, known as EULEX, reported that "a stun grenade was thrown at an EULEX reconnaissance patrol last night," causing no injury or material damage.

EULEX, which has some 134 Polish, Italian and Lithuanian police officers deployed in the north, called on "those responsible to refrain from more provocative actions" and said it urged the Kosovo institutions "to bring the perpetrators to justice."

Unidentified masked men were seen on

the Serb barricades that were blocking main roads leading to the border with Serbia, as Kosovo authorities closed two border crossings to all traffic and pedestrians.

On Sunday morning, the situation was calm on the barricades, but with an increased presence of Kosovar Albanian police in the areas with a mixed population in the north, and more international police and soldiers elsewhere.

Elsewhere, Serbian officials claimed that heavily armed Kosovo policemen "burst into" premises of a strategic Serb-controlled dam on the artificial Gazivode Lake on the border with Serbia.

The report could not be independently verified. The Serb officials asked urgent EU action to "restrain the thugs" who, they alleged, want to trigger another war with Serbia.

Scientists lower Mauna Loa alert, saying eruption could end

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Scientists lowered the alert level for the Mauna Loa volcano on Hawaii's Big Island from a warning to a watch Saturday, and said the mountain's first eruption in nearly 40 years may soon end.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said in a bulletin that the eruption on the mountain's northeast rift zone was continuing, but lava output and volcanic gas emissions were "greatly reduced."

"High eruption rates will not resume based on past eruptive behavior and cur-

rent behavior suggests that the eruption may end soon," the observatory said. "However, an inflationary trend of Mauna Loa's summit is accompanying the decreased activity and there is a small possibility that the eruption could continue at very low eruptive rates."

Meanwhile, it said, a lava flow front had "stagnated" nearly two miles from Saddle Road, the vital highway that residents and tourists alike use to travel between the city of Hilo on the east side of the island and coastal resorts to the west.

Scientists said earlier in the week that the road was no longer under imminent threat

from the lava, allaying previous fears it could be cut off.

Mauna Loa began spewing molten rock Nov. 27 after being quiet for 38 years, drawing onlookers to take in the incandescent spectacle and setting some nerves on edge early on among people who've lived through destructive eruptions. For many Native Hawaiians, the phenomenon has a deep yet very personal cultural significance.

The observatory said its scientists were continuing to monitor the volcano closely, and flight restrictions remained in place in the area up to 1,500 feet above ground level.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man with paintball gun shot in police station lot

CA RIALTO — A man who was shot after entering a police station parking lot with what appeared to be an assault rifle was in stable condition Wednesday and the weapon he used was a realistic-looking paintball gun, authorities said.

Police said Gunther Elizalde Tellez, 35, of San Bernardino, remained hospitalized, police said.

The shooting happened after a police officer drove his cruiser through the security gate at the police station in Rialto, east of Los Angeles, and Tellez followed his vehicle inside, police said.

Tellez got out of his car and security camera footage showed him running up to the police car with the rifle in hand. He then began running back to the car but stopped and raised the rifle, pointing it at the officer, Police Chief Mark Kling said.

Tellez was shot several times. Investigators said the weapon turned out to be a paintball gun that looked like an AR-15-style assault rifle.

Store allegedly selling mushrooms raided

OR PORTLAND — A store that had been openly and illegally selling psychedelic mushrooms was raided by police on Thursday, authorities said.

In 2020, Oregon became the first state in the country to legalize the use of psilocybin for people 21 and older in a controlled, therapeutic environment under

the supervision of trained facilitators.

But the ballot measure, approved by 56% of voters, did not allow for retail sale — and legalization won't take effect until next month.

Police served a search warrant at the retailer, called the Shroom House, in the Northwest District neighborhood, the Portland Police Bureau said in a news release. Investigators seized about 22 pounds of suspected mushrooms and over \$13,000 in cash, police said.

Steven Tachie Jr., 32, and Jeremiah Geronimo, 32, were booked into the Multnomah County Detention Center on suspicion of 10 counts each of money laundering and 10 counts each of unlawful delivery of a controlled substance within 1,000 feet of a school. Two other men were cited for alleged felony delivery of psilocybin, police said.

SpaceX gives rival's satellites ride to orbit

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — SpaceX launched internet satellites for a competitor, stepping in to help after the London-based OneWeb company halted its flights with Russia over the invasion of Ukraine.

The Falcon rocket blasted off at sunset with 40 mini satellites bound for polar orbit. They will expand OneWeb's constellation to just over 500, nearly 80% of the planned total of about 630 satellites.

Elon Musk's SpaceX has more than 3,200 Starlink satellites in orbit, providing high-speed, broadband internet to remote corners of the world. Amazon plans to launch the first of its internet satellites early next

year from Cape Canaveral.

SpaceX agreed to launch satellites for OneWeb after the British company broke ties with Russia in March. Russian Soyuz rockets already had launched 13 batches of OneWeb satellites.

Boy arrested after leaving school, stealing rifle

IN WEST TERRE HAUTE — An 11-year-old student will face juvenile charges of pointing a firearm and theft after leaving school, stealing a rifle from a nearby home and pointing the weapon at police officers, a sheriff said Wednesday.

The boy was excused from class at Sugar Creek Consolidated Elementary School in West Terre Haute to go to a restroom but instead left the building, Vigo County Sheriff John Plasse said. School protection officers and personnel searching for him did not find him inside the building and the search moved outside, with more officers joining the hunt, Plasse said.

Officers then heard gunshots from around a wooded area and field and found the boy and detained him, Plasse said. The boy pointed the gun at officers but did not fire, Plasse said.

The student was arrested and taken to the Vigo County Juvenile Center.

Rat-fighting mayor fined over infestation in home

NY NEW YORK — New York City Mayor Eric Adams is such an enemy of rats that he once called a press conference to demonstrate a contraption for drowning them in poison. Now Adams finds himself contesting a \$300 fine

issued by his own administration over a rat infestation at a building he owns in Brooklyn.

Adams was issued a summons by the city health department on May 10 after a health inspector spotted "fresh rat droppings" at his townhouse on Lafayette Avenue in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood.

The New York Times reports that Adams dialed into a city administrative court hearing on Tuesday to contest the \$300 fine, which he was issued after first ignoring the summons.

Adams told the hearing officer that he had spent nearly \$7,000 battling rats at the property and had even used the rat-drowning device that he promoted in 2019 when he was Brooklyn borough president, the Times said.

US currency signed by female pair for first time

TX FORT WORTH — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Thursday helped mark a milestone in U.S. history when she held up a newly minted \$5 bill signed for the first time ever by two women.

Yellen's signature will appear alongside that of U.S. Treasurer Lynn Malerba, the first Native American in that position.

Yellen joked during a stop in Texas about the bad handwriting of some of her male predecessors and said, "I will admit, I spent some quality time practicing my signature."

"Two women on the currency for the first time is truly momentous," added Malerba, who traveled with Yellen to a Bureau of Engraving and Printing facility in Fort Worth to provide their signatures.

— From wire reports

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Reporting
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and Military News

Army outlasts Navy in double-overtime

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Navy running back Anton Hall Jr. collapsed to the ground and buried his face in his hands. West Point cadets spilled from the stands onto the field and joined Army players who ripped off their helmets and ran around in celebration.

Hall's push toward the end zone in the second overtime — and first OT game in Army-Navy history — resulted in a fumble that Army recovered. The Black Knights went from playing for a tie to simply playing for a winning score.

"Somehow, the ball got loose and we hit that thing when we needed to," Army coach Jeff Monken said.

Quinn Maretzki kicked the game-winning, 39-yard field goal after he had sent the game into overtime with a 37-yarder late in the fourth quarter and led Army past the Midshipmen 20-17 on Saturday night in the first OT game in the 123 matchups of "America's Game."

"It's obviously a big moment, but I try my best to put that aside," Maretzki said. "Just being able to block everything out, (my teammates) just made that job so easy for me. So I just had to go out there and not even really think."

Hall — who earlier raced 77 yards for a TD and 10-7 lead — coughed up the ball as he plunged toward the end zone and stood crestfallen as Maretzki prepared to kick the winner. Hall dropped to the ground as the kick sailed through the uprights and he was consoled by teammate Amin Hassan. But the fullback's fumble forced by Austin Hill and recovered by defensive lineman Nate Smith will forever be etched on the highlight reel of game-changing plays in the series.

"The game is not lost with him. That could happen to anyone that was carrying the ball on that one play," Navy QB Xavier Arline said. "They made a good play. That's football. That's life. The game was not

lost within that one play."

Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo stood hunched on the sideline and could not stomach to watch the final field goal.

"What do you tell them when you get your heart broken?" Niumatalolo said. "We were in the driver's seat. We were feeling pretty good. Unfortunately, the game slipped out of our hands."

The offense was stagnant throughout the game until the waning moments of regulation when Maretzki kicked the 37-yarder with 1:53 left to tie the game at 10-all.

A thrilling overtime followed.

The NCAA instituted overtime in 1996, and the series had never had to go a little extra to settle one of the sport's greatest rivalry games.

Army's Markel Johnson ran 25 yards for a touchdown on the first play of overtime for a 17-10 lead, and Navy matched the Black Knights when Arline tossed a 25-yard touchdown pass to Maquel Haywood that made it 17-all.

It was Navy's first completion of the game and Arline had perhaps the sweetest 1-for-1 for 25-yard game in Navy history. He also rushed for 102 yards.

Navy still leads the series against Army 62-54-7. The Black Knights, though, have won five of the last seven meetings.

Army finished 6-6 overall this season; Navy is 4-8.

"This team never stopping fighting, they never stopped believing," Monken said. "Somehow, some way, we found a way to get it done tonight. It was an epic battle. It was one I'll remember for a long time, probably forever."

The teams combined for only 53 yards passing.

One of Cade Ballard's rare passing attempts for Army was a success when a pass interference call brought the ball down to the 28 with four minutes left on a drive that set up Maretzki's tying field goal.

Ballard was 2-for-10 passing for 26 yards.

USC quarterback Williams takes home Heisman Trophy

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Caleb Williams brought sizzle, excitement and star power back to Southern California football.

And now the Heisman Trophy, too.

Williams, the dynamic quarterback who was the catalyst for the Trojans' turnaround season, won the Heisman on Saturday night to make USC the first school to take home college football's most prestigious player of the year award eight times.

Williams received 544 first-place votes and 2,031 points to easily outpoint TCU quarterback Max Duggan (1,420).

Williams, who played last season at Oklahoma, is the fourth transfer to win the Heisman in the past six years, join-

ing Baker Mayfield (2017) and Kyler Murray (2018) of Oklahoma and Joe Burrow (2019) of LSU.

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was third in the voting after coming in fourth last season. Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett, the first Bulldogs player to attend the presentation in 30 years, finished fourth. No. 1 Georgia will face Stroud and the fourth-ranked Buckeyes in the College Football Playoff on Dec. 31.

Duggan and the third-ranked Horned Frogs will play No. 2 Michigan in the other CFP semifinal on New Year's Eve.

"I may be standing up here today, but y'all get to go to the College Football Playoffs. Guess you can't win 'em all," Williams

said as he started his acceptance speech by thanking the other finalists.

Before taking hold of his big bronze trophy, Williams hugged Mike Garrett, USC's first Heisman winner in 1965, Garrett was one of 23 previous winners — and three former Trojans along with Matt Leinart and Carson Palmer — to attend the ceremony near Lincoln Center.

Williams was as meticulous and thorough with his 10-minute speech as he is preparing for a game. And almost as poised as when he plays.

Williams got a little choked up talking about coach Lincoln Riley, who he followed from Norman to Los Angeles, and really had to hold it together when thanking his parents.

He called his mother, Dayna, who paints his nails with a motivational message before each game, the most important woman in his life.

He thanked his father, Carl, for instilling a relentless work ethic.

"You're always there for me making sacrifices in your life so I can achieve my dreams, which eventually became our dreams," Caleb Williams said.

He finished with USC's battle cry: "Dreams really do come true. Thank you, and fight on."

Williams and No. 8 USC fell short of the Pac-12 championship and a spot in the playoff, but it was still a rebirth for a college football blue blood that has had only short spurts of success over the past decade.

Warriors top Celtics in NBA Finals rematch

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Six months later, the Splash Brothers were still feeling it from all over the court against the Celtics and delivered one of their team's signature wins of the season so far.

Klay Thompson scored 34 points, Stephen Curry added 32 with six three-pointers and Golden State beat Boston 123-107 on Saturday night in a rematch of this year's NBA Finals won by the Warriors in six games.

"We gutted it out," Warriors coach Steve Kerr said. "Steph and Klay obviously had it rolling, so we were making shots."

Jordan Poole had 20 points starting in place of injured An-

drew Wiggins despite shooting 1-for-9 from long range.

Thompson scored 12 of his points in the opening quarter shooting 5-for-9 and had 24 by halftime. Curry shot 12 for 21 and had seven assists and six rebounds playing 37 minutes.

The Warriors were coming off a 124-123 loss at Utah on Wednesday night that Thompson called a "collapse."

"It's always nice to respond with a great performance and we did that tonight," Thompson said.

Spurs 115, Heat 111: Keldon Johnson scored 21 points, Romeo Langford added 19 and visiting San Antonio celebrated the 26th anniversary of Gregg Popovich's first game as coach by

beating Miami.

Nuggets 115, Jazz 110: Nikola Jokic had 31 points, 14 assists and 12 rebounds in his 80th career triple-double and host Denver held off undermanned Utah.

Bulls 144, Mavericks 115: DeMar DeRozan had 28 points and nine rebounds and host Chicago took advantage of NBA scoring leader Luka Doncic's absence to rout Dallas.

Doncic sat out with a strained right quadriceps. Swingman Josh Green also was out with a right elbow sprain and forward/center Maxi Kleber missed the game because of a sore right foot.

Clippers 114, Wizards 107: Nicolas Batum made a tiebreaking three-pointer with 23.8 seconds remaining and visiting Los

Angeles sent Washington to its sixth straight loss.

Paul George scored 36 points for the Clippers and John Wall added 13 in his return to Washington, but it was Batum who made big shots in the final quarter. He hit three three-pointers in the last 4:52 and finished with 12 points.

Cavaliers 110, Thunder 102: Caris LeVert scored 22 points, Evan Mobley had 21 points and 12 rebounds and host Cleveland never trailed against Oklahoma City.

Trail Blazers 124, Timberwolves 118: Damian Lillard had 36 points and eight assists, Anfernee Simons added 31 points and host Portland beat Minnesota.

Alabama just 2nd team to beat two No. 1s in season

Associated Press

HOUSTON — No. 8 Alabama could have called it a day when it was trailing by double figures early in the second half.

The Crimson Tide didn't, and earned another marquee win this season.

Alabama rallied from a 15-point second-half deficit to stun No. 1 Houston 71-65 on Saturday, becoming just the second men's team to beat two top-ranked teams in the same season.

Noah Clowney had 16 points and 11 rebounds, Jaden Bradley added 12 points and Mark Sears scored 11 points, including nine in the second half for the Crimson Tide (8-1). Alabama shot 50% from the field in the second half and 41% for the game. The Tide went 20-for-32 on free throws, including 15-for-21 in the second half.

"This is one of those character wins that shows that our guys are going to keep fighting no matter what the score is," Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "We could have easily given up down 15. The start of the second half wasn't great. We made some changes with the bench guys. Hung in there, kept clawing away at the lead, finally able to take the lead and then we pulled away from them."

No. 2 Texas 88, Arkansas-Pine Bluff 43: Christian Bishop scored 16 points and the host Longhorns held the Golden Lions to 13 points in the second half while coasting to a

win.

Texas rose to its highest ranking in more than a decade after a 6-0 start before dropping an overtime loss against No. 17 Illinois earlier in the week in New York City.

No. 4 Purdue 65, Nebraska 62 (OT): Fletcher Loyer scored a season-high 22 points and Braden Smith made four free throws in the last 28 seconds of overtime to give the visiting Boilermakers a hard-earned victory over the Cornhuskers.

No. 5 UConn 114, Long Island 61: Freshman Donovan Clingan had a career-high 21 points and 11 rebounds to lead the host Huskies over the Sharks.

No. 6 Kansas 95, Missouri 67: Jalen Wilson had 24 points and 10 rebounds, K.J. Adams Jr. scored a career-high 19 and the Jayhawks routed the Tigers in their first trip to their old Big 12 rival in more than a decade.

No. 9 Arkansas 88, Oklahoma 78: Ricky Council IV scored 26 points and Nick Smith Jr. had 21 in the visiting Razorbacks' victory over the Sooners.

No. 10 Arizona 89, No. 14 Indiana 75: Azuolas Tubelis scored 21 points and the Wildcats defeated the Hoosiers in the Vegas Clash.

Memphis 82, No. 11 Auburn 73: Kendrick Davis scored a season-high 27 points, and Memphis ended Auburn's season-opening eight-game winning streak at the

Holiday Hoopsgiving showcase in Atlanta.

No. 15 Duke 82, Md.-Eastern Shore 55: Tyrese Proctor and Dariq Whitehead each scored 15 points and the host Blue Devils rolled past the Hawks while using an all-freshman starting lineup for the first time in program history.

No. 16 Kentucky 69, Yale 59: Oscar Tshiebwe scored 28 points and had 12 rebounds to lead the host Wildcats over the Bulldogs.

Penn State 74, No. 17 Illinois 59: Andrew Funk and Myles Dread combined for 11 three-pointers to help the visiting Nittany Lions beat the Illini.

No. 19 UCLA 87, Denver 64: Jaylen Clark scored 24 points, and the host Bruins opened the second half with a 17-0 run in a blowout of the Pioneers for their fifth straight victory.

BYU 83, No. 21 Creighton 80: Freshman guard Dallin Hall hit a go-ahead putback with 11 seconds left in Las Vegas, and the Cougars handed the Bluejays their fourth straight loss.

Saint Mary's 68, No. 22 San Diego State 61: Aidan Mahaney scored 20 points, Alex Ducas added 17 and the Gaels knocked off the Aztecs in the Jerry Colangelo Classic in Phoenix.

No. 24 TCU 83, SMU 75: Mike Miles Jr. returned to the lineup with 18 points and the host Horned Frogs extended their winning

UFC light heavyweight title still vacant

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The light heavyweight title remained vacant Saturday night after judges awarded the main event in UFC 282 a draw so controversial that both fighters, Jan Blachowicz and Magomed Ankalaev, agreed Ankalaev should have won the belt.

During the post-fight interview in the octagon, No. 3 Blachowicz (29-9-1) walked over to fourth-ranked Ankalaev (18-1-1) and told him he deserved the belt.

Ankalaev was so upset over the decision he said through a Russian interpreter he didn't know if he would "fight in this organization again."

"I won that fight," Ankalaev said. "I won the belt. Where is my belt?"

Judge Mike Bell scored the fight 48-47 for Blachowicz, Derek Cleary 48-46 for Ankalaev and Sal D'Amato 47-47.

Blachowicz seemed embarrassed by the decision.

"Maybe we can have a rematch," Blachowicz said somewhat sheepishly. "I don't choose the judges."

The co-main event also went to the scorecards, and there was far from widespread agreement among the fans about the results of that fight as well.

Even if Blachowicz-Ankalaev was the main event, much of the crowd came to see England's Paddy Pimblett in the co-main fight. American Jared Gordon, 34, had other ideas, dictating the tempo in the light-weight match even as the crowd repeatedly yelled, "Let's go, Paddy!"

But even much of the crowd had trouble believing the decision, with many booing Pimblett (20-3) winning 29-28 on all three judges' cards. Gordon shook his head and laughed when the scores were announced.

"It wasn't that close," Pimblett insisted.

The brash 27-year-old has become a polarizing figure in the UFC, but has backed up his words with his performances in the cage to date, even getting a major benefit of the doubt from the judges over Gordon (19-6). This was the first time Pimblett has fought into the third round since entering the UFC in September 2021.

As for the main event, Blachowicz and Ankalaev weren't expected to be the headliners, but light heavyweight champion Jiri Prochazka dropped out because of a shoulder injury. Second-ranked Glover Teixeira declined to fight Blachowicz, vacating the title and elevating this fight to a championship bout.

The fight was even through the first two rounds, but Blachowicz began to get the upper hand in the third with his kicks that weakened Ankalaev. Then Ankalaev took the Polish fighter to the floor with about five seconds left and came out swinging in the fourth.

Ankalaev took Blachowicz back to the floor with a little more than three minutes left and kept him there the remainder of the fourth, but wasn't able to get a submission.

Again in the fifth, Ankalaev came out the aggressor by throwing punches and quickly getting Blachowicz to the floor, where it became a wrestling match the rest of the way.

"I did everything to get this victory," Ankalaev said.

Hurricanes shut out Islanders, extend point streak

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Paul Stastny scored in the second period, Pyotr Kochetkov got his second career shutout, and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the New York Islanders 3-0 Saturday night to extend their point streak to seven games.

Jesper Kotkaniemi and Jordan Staal also scored, and Kochetkov had 16 saves as Carolina improved to 5-0-2 on its current streak.

"From our standpoint, we did a lot of the things we wanted to do," veteran forward Derek Stepan said. "We executed when we had the puck on our stick and defended extremely well when we didn't."

Ilya Sorokin finished with 28 saves as the Islanders lost for the fourth time in six games.

Penguins 3, Sabres 1: Sidney Crosby scored two goals, defenseman Kris Letang returned 12 days after the second stroke of his career and host Pittsburgh beat Buffalo.

Rickard Rakell also scored to help the Penguins win their fifth straight and improve to 12-2-2 in their last 16 games. Casey DeSmith, making his first start in six games, stopped 37 shots as Pittsburgh completed a sweep of the home-and-home series after

also winning 4-3 in overtime at Buffalo on Friday night.

Peyton Krebs scored for the Sabres, who lost for the third time in five games. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen finished with 28 saves.

Letang, who missed five games, led the Penguins with 22:14 of ice time. The 35-year-old Letang suffered his second stroke on Nov. 28 after dealing with a series of debilitating headaches.

Maple Leafs 5, Flames 4 (OT): Mitch Marner scored 43 seconds into overtime to send host Toronto past Calgary.

Marner also picked up an assist in the first period to extend his franchise-record point streak to 22 games. He has 11 goals and 19 assists within that stretch.

William Nylander had two goals and three assists for Toronto, and Auston Matthews had a goal and two assists.

Lightning 4, Panthers 1: Brayden Point, Mikhail Sergachev and Steven Stamkos scored in the third period, powering host Tampa Bay to the win.

Stamkos got his 496th career goal with 3:15 to play. The Lightning captain has eight goals and 12 assists during a 13-game point streak.

Kings 4, Canadiens 2: Anze Kopitar and

Viktor Arvidsson scored in the first period, and visiting Los Angeles held off Montreal.

Alexander Edler also scored for Los Angeles (15-11-4), and Adrian Kempe added an empty-netter. Pheonix Copley made 20 saves.

Stars 3, Red Wings (OT): Nils Lundkvist scored 4:29 into overtime, lifting host Dallas over Detroit.

Jamie Benn and Denis Gurianov also scored for the Stars. Jake Oettinger got his 11th win of the season by stopping 24 shots.

David Perron scored for Detroit in his 1,000th career NHL game. Dylan Larkin also scored, and Ville Husso made 30 stops.

Senators 3, Predators 2: Claude Giroux, Alex DeBrincat and Drake Batherson scored, leading visiting Ottawa past Nashville.

Shane Pinto had two assists and Cam Talbot made 27 saves for the Senators, who had dropped two in a row.

Yakov Trenin and Nino Niederreiter scored for Nashville. Juuse Saros made 30 saves.

Wild 3, Canucks 0: Filip Gustavsson stopped 35 shots for his first NHL shutout as visiting Minnesota snapped a two-game skid.