

## Trump may revisit military in Somalia

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — One of President-elect Donald Trump's last actions during his first term was pulling all U.S. forces out of Somalia, a move that could be back on the table in a second term that carries the potential for a broader scaling-back of military activities on the continent.

Of all of U.S. Africa Command's missions, its campaign in Somalia is likely to come under a microscope soonest, said J. Peter Pham, who served as special envoy to Africa's volatile Sahel region during Trump's first term.

"I would expect that President Trump will want to reverse course and restore things to where he intended at the end of 2020," Pham said Sunday.

Pham said current conditions in Somalia, where a decadeslong

conflict between Islamic militants and a weak central government continues to play out, justify pulling out U.S. forces once again.

"Quite frankly, as the corruption of even allegedly elite units like Danab has underscored, we do not have an effective partner in Mogadishu, and there are no U.S. national security interests that justify risking American treasure — much less American blood — in Somalia that cannot be handled offshore or from nearby bases," Pham said.

AFRICOM has several hundred troops positioned in Somalia, where they serve as advisers to local forces. There's a special focus on the Danab unit, which the U.S. military has touted as one of Somalia's most capable forces.

President Joe Biden in 2022 directed U.S. personnel back to So-

malia on a continuous basis, reversing Trump's order in late 2020 that resulted in some 700 troops being moved out of the country.

Biden's decision came in the wake of criticism from then-AFRICOM commander Gen. Stephen Townsend, who said the rotational approach that replaced the full-time presence in Somalia amounted to "commuting to work" and allowed insurgents to gain ground.

Trump's move out of Somalia was something he had sought to do earlier in his term. Former Defense Secretary Mark Esper, in his memoir about his time in the Trump administration, said Trump was skeptical about the AFRICOM mission as a whole.

Trump "didn't see much value in having any Americans, whether they be military personnel or diplomats, based anywhere on

the continent," Esper wrote in his book, "A Sacred Oath." "The bottom line was that Trump wanted out of Africa completely, and Somalia now seemed to be the start point."

The Pentagon under Trump is expected to make China more of a focal point, which means that resources could be pulled from lower-priority missions and sent toward Asia.

In the case of Africa, al-Shabab has proved resilient despite an international effort to help Somalia's government counter it. Meanwhile, AFRICOM has raised concern about other militants expanding their reach in parts of western Africa.

So far, however, such groups have not demonstrated an ability to strike outside the African continent, raising questions about how significant of a threat they pose to the U.S. homeland.

## Jimmy Carter dies at 100, leaves behind mixed legacy

*Associated Press*

ATLANTA — Jimmy Carter, the peanut farmer who won the presidency in the wake of the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War, endured humbling defeat after one tumultuous term and then redefined life after the White House as a global humanitarian, has died. He was 100 years old.

The longest-lived American president died on Sunday, roughly 22 months after entering hos-

pice care, at his home in the small town of Plains, Ga., where he and his wife, Rosalynn, who died at 96 in November 2023, spent most of their lives, The Carter Center said.

It added in a statement that he died peacefully, surrounded by his family.

As reaction poured in from around the world, President Joe Biden mourned Carter's death, saying the world lost an "extraordinary leader, statesman and humanitarian" and he lost a dear friend. Biden cited Carter's work to eradicate disease, forge peace, advance civil and human rights, promote free and fair elections and house the homeless as an example for others.

Businessman, Navy officer,

evangelist, politician, negotiator, author, woodworker, citizen of the world — Carter forged a path that still challenges political assumptions and stands out among the 45 men who reached the nation's highest office. The 39th president leveraged his ambition with a keen intellect, deep religious faith and prodigious work ethic, conducting diplomatic missions into his 80s and building houses for the poor well into his 90s.

"My faith demands — this is not optional — my faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can, with whatever I have to try to make a difference," Carter once said.

Carter governed amid Cold War pressures, turbulent oil mar-

kets and social upheaval over racism, women's rights and America's global role. His most acclaimed achievement in office was a Mideast peace deal that he brokered in 1978. That Camp David experience inspired the post-presidential center where Carter would establish so much of his legacy.

Yet Carter's electoral coalition splintered under double-digit inflation, gasoline lines and the 44-day hostage crisis in Iran. His bleakest hour came when eight Americans died in a failed hostage rescue in April 1980. It helped to ensure his landslide defeat to Republican Ronald Reagan amid claims that Carter's policies had rendered the U.S. military a "hollow force."

### Note to readers

Stripes Lite will not be published on Tuesday or Wednesday. We will return on Thursday.

# Attack risk complicates recovery of jet

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — Recovery of a Navy fighter jet recently downed over the Red Sea likely hinges on what's left of the wreckage and how safely a salvage operation could be pulled off, analysts say.

The F/A-18 Super Hornet launched from the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman was shot down by apparent "friendly fire" from the guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg on Dec. 22.

Although the jet is being phased out, newer Block III versions of it have equipment upgrades that could be a tempting target for adversaries.

It's unknown whether the F/A-18 in question was a Block III or had been outfitted with the newer technology, which includes an infrared system useful in pinpointing stealth aircraft, better radar equipment and a precision approach landing system.

"There would perhaps be sensitive material onboard ... worth recovery, but it depends on the condition of the aircraft and where it went down in the Red Sea," said Steven Wills, a naval analyst with the Center for Maritime Strategy at the Navy League of the United States.

The aircraft may have been largely destroyed, so it's uncertain how much might be left to recover, he said.

"Much of the Red Sea is relatively shallow ... but there are some deep trenches that are very deep," he said. "The U.S. has recovered downed intact aircraft in the past, but recovery of wreckage perhaps strewn over miles of seabed would be a challenge."

The Navy would not say whether it's considering a recovery effort, referring questions to U.S. Central Command, which cited the ongoing investigation in declining comment.

If a fifth-generation fighter were lost, the Navy would al-

most certainly seek to retrieve it.

When an F-35C fighter attempting to land on the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson crashed and slipped into the South China Sea in January 2022, the Navy announced it was working quickly to find the \$103 million jet.

The plane was recovered about 37 days later from a depth of 12,400 feet. That operation included a remotely operated diving vehicle and crane from a diving support construction vessel, Stars and Stripes reported in March 2022.

In August 2022, a Block II Super Hornet was recovered in the Mediterranean Sea after it blew off the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman during a storm the month before.

In that case, the jet was recovered from a depth of about 9,500 feet roughly a half-mile from the estimated point where it entered the water in the Ionian Sea, a portion of the Medi-

terranean that is bounded by Sicily, southern Italy, southern Albania and the western coast of Greece.

But recovery of the jet lost last week over the Red Sea also would be complicated by the threat of Houthi one-way attack drones and anti-ship missiles, said Sal Mercogliano, an adjunct professor at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy who has served ashore and at sea for Military Sealift Command.

While the Navy has salvage ships, "both are in the Pacific and (the operation) would be in an area that would require a great deal of protection," Mercogliano said.

CENTCOM has released few details about the circumstances of the shootdown, citing the ongoing investigation.

The crew had completed an earlier mission and was responding to an attack threatening the Truman Carrier Strike Group. Both aviators ejected from the aircraft and were recovered.

## Military sees more diagnoses of anxiety, PTSD

By REBECCA HOLLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

Diagnoses for mental disorders among U.S. service members increased nearly 40% in a five-year period that partly overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new report that military researchers say demonstrates a growing need for health services.

From the beginning of 2019 through the end of 2023, more than 541,000 active service members were diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder and about half that number were diagnosed with at least two, the report said.

More than half of the diagnoses, nearly 283,000 cases, were for adjustment disorder, ac-

cording to the latest edition of Medical Surveillance Monthly Report, a peer-reviewed journal of the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Division.

The disorder is time-limited and characterized by impaired function due to stress. It can be serious and is a risk for suicide, according to the Mayo Clinic website, but can also be mild, and in most cases, is manageable within a few months.

A 2022 study published in the journal *Military Medicine* found that 57% of service members with attachment disorder received the diagnosis within their first three years of service.

Meanwhile, anxiety diagnoses rose 77% from the beginning of the five-year period to 48,940

last year. Depression cases also showed a substantial increase, with nearly 40,000 last year.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, while far below figures at the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, nearly doubled during the time period to 22,386 cases. The diagnoses included rising numbers of women.

"Congruent with prior reports, service members in health care occupations continued to represent high rates of PTSD, potentially reflecting the psychological stresses inherent to many health care roles in both peace and wartime operations," the researchers said.

The report looked at all active-duty members of the Army,

Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Space Force through records in the Defense Medical Surveillance System.

It excluded those who either didn't seek care or went to a private practitioner or counselor, so the true numbers could be higher, the researchers said.

In 2023, mental health disorders accounted for 54.8% of hospital bed days among active-duty service members, researchers found.

The Army had the highest rate of mental health disorders. The Navy had the highest rate of depressive disorders, bipolar disorder and personality disorders, while the Coast Guard had the highest rates of acute stress disorders, the report said.

# Caucus on Hill lets vets band together

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The players in this year's Army-Navy football game kept up a long tradition, with each side honoring the other's school song when the contest ended. It was an acknowledgment that the future could bring moments when the opponents that day are teammates on deadlier fields.

That ethos also guides a group in the U.S. House that calls itself the For Country Caucus. Its members are veterans with wide military experience who have banded together across party and ideological lines. At a time when bipartisan working relationships in Congress seem rare, with little hope for change in the coming session, the caucus shows there are still spaces where people with different views come together.

"We're trying to lead by example, both within Congress to show our colleagues that this is possible, but also to America more broadly," said Colorado Democrat Jason Crow, who is one of the outgoing co-chairs of the caucus.

"People only get deluged with the crazy aspects of Congress and the things that don't work and the people yelling and screaming," Crow said. "We just don't get as much attention when we're actually working together."

The caucus began in 2019 to bridge the divides that plague

Washington and slow its effectiveness, said Steve Womack, a Republican member of the caucus from Arkansas and a retired colonel in the Army National Guard.

Bringing together people who see themselves as sharing a commitment to putting country and mission first seemed like a starting point "to maybe advance some agendas that would be good for the country," Womack said. Deadlines, comfort with high-pressure situations and a focus on common goals create "a kind of warrior ethos," he said.

Since then, the group has been integral in getting more than 100 bills passed into law. The legislation includes such areas as national security, strengthening the military, veterans' issues, national service and supporting military families, especially those that have lost loved ones.

The caucus was instrumental in getting an increase — the first in two decades — in payments designed to help military families bear the added costs of deployments. The caucus also pushed a provision to allow federal agencies to appoint military spouses to remote work positions, an action that could allow them to keep their jobs despite multiple moves.

Other legislation signed recently included an act to help continue efforts to evacuate Afghans who served alongside U.S.

military members, diplomats and aid workers in Afghanistan.

One of the group's first successes was the effort to establish the Global War on Terrorism Memorial on the National Mall. Its design is underway.

"We are a small but mighty caucus that punches way above its weight," Crow said.

Members of it sit on a number of committees together and meet regularly, including breakfast briefings twice a month. Recently, those briefings have included the heads of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force, as well as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Other guests have spoken about national service, such as the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps and Voices for National Service.

"We believe really strongly that one of the ways to bring Americans together is to get Americans to work together again," Crow said.

That doesn't have to be in the military, he said. People also can find common ground by serving their communities.

Their staff members also meet, and the representatives have some functions off Capitol Hill, including washing the black granite walls at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Two members of the outgoing group are retiring, while the 28 others were reelected. The caucus expects to pick up at least

five new members in the next Congress, meaning nearly 8% of the House will be part of the caucus.

Crow, a former Army Ranger who served multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, and his co-chair, Texas Republican Tony Gonzales, a retired Navy chief petty officer, will hand over the leadership to Texas Republican Jake Ellzey, a former F/A-18 pilot, and Air Force Academy alumnus Don Davis, a North Carolina Democrat.

Edward Crawford, a co-founder of War Veterans Fund, which recruits Republican war veterans to run for Congress, has had several candidates join the caucus after winning their races.

"In a polarized world and a very polarized country, we veterans have to work with everybody," he said. "You go into combat, Black, white, Hispanic, Asian, it doesn't matter. You're getting shot at. You're working together. You're covering each other. Democrat or Republican, it doesn't matter."

Pushing specific ideologies is not part of its purpose, Crow said. Finding common ground, even in disagreements, is.

"We're not going to take an all-or-nothing mentality because we know that when people take an all-or-nothing mentality, Americans end up with nothing," he said. "That's just not acceptable to us."

## VA finds suicide rate among vets held steady in 2022

**BY LINDA F. HERSEY**

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The number of veteran suicides continued to hold steady in 2022 despite an infusion of \$13.5 billion in funds for mental health services for former service members, according to newly released findings from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Veteran suicides rose to 6,407 for calendar year 2022, up by three from the previous year, according to the VA's 2024 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report that examined suicides by population groups of veterans.

The report showed firearm deaths contributed to most veteran suicides — used in 75% of sui-

cides by male veterans, up 2% from the previous year. Firearms were used in about 45% of suicides among female veterans, down 6% from 2021, the VA said.

Firearms account for more suicides among veterans than in the non-veteran, general population, according to the report. From 2021 to 2022, the percentage of veteran suicides involving fire-

arms increased about 7%.

Overall, the suicide rate among male veterans was up 1.6% in 2022 but the rate among women dropped significantly — by about 24%. The suicide rate increase for male veterans was comparable to the general population. But the suicide rate among women in the general population went up by more than 5%.

# S. Korea to inspect its Boeing jetliners

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korean officials said Monday they will conduct safety inspections of all Boeing 737-800 aircraft operated by the country's airlines, as they struggle to determine what caused a plane crash that killed 179 people a day earlier.

Sunday's crash triggered an outpouring of national sympathy. Many people worry how effectively the South Korean government will handle the disaster as it grapples with a leadership vacuum following the recent successive impeachments of President Yoon Suk Yeol and Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's top two officials, amid political tumult caused by Yoon's brief imposition of martial law earlier this month.

New acting President Choi Sang-mok on Monday presided

over a task force meeting on the crash and instructed authorities to conduct an emergency review of the country's aircraft operation systems.

"The essence of a responsible response would be renovating the aviation safety systems on the whole to prevent recurrences of similar incidents and building a safer Republic of South Korea," said Choi, who is also deputy prime minister and finance minister.

The Boeing 737-800 plane operated by South Korean budget airline Jeju Air aborted its first landing attempt for unknown reasons.

Then, during its second landing attempt, it received a bird strike warning from the ground control center before its pilot issued a distress signal. The plane landed without its front landing gear deployed, overshoot the runway, slammed into

a concrete fence and burst into flames.

Alan Price, a former chief pilot at Delta Air Lines and now a consultant, said the Boeing 737-800 is a "proven airplane" that belongs to a different class of aircraft than the Boeing 737 Max jetliner that was linked to fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019.

But South Korea's Transport Ministry said Monday it plans to conduct safety inspections of all of the 101 Boeing 737-800 jetliners operated by the country's airlines as well as a broader review into safety standards at Jeju Air, which operates 39 of those planes. Senior ministry official Joo Jong-wan said representatives from the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and Boeing were expected to arrive in South Korea on Monday to participate in the investigation.

Ministry officials also said

they will look into whether the Muan airport's localizer — a concrete fence housing a set of antennas designed to guide aircraft safely during landings — should have been made with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact.

Joo said the ministry has determined that similar concrete structures are in other domestic airports, including in Jeju Island and the southern cities of Yeosu and Pohang, as well as airports in the United States, Spain and South Africa.

Video of the crash indicated that the pilots did not deploy flaps or slats to slow the aircraft, suggesting a possible hydraulic failure, and did not manually lower the landing gear, suggesting they did not have time, said John Cox, a retired airline pilot and CEO of Safety Operating Systems in St. Petersburg, Fla.

## Finland's probe of cable damage finds anchor mark

Associated Press

HELSINKI, Finland — Finnish investigators probing the damage to a Baltic Sea power cable and several data cables said they found an anchor drag mark on the seabed, apparently from a Russia-linked vessel that has already been seized.

The Estlink-2 power cable, which transmits energy from Finland to Estonia across the Baltic Sea, went down on Dec. 25 after a rupture. It had little impact on services but followed earlier damage to two data cables and the Nord Stream gas pipelines, both of which have been termed sabotage.

Finnish police chief investigator, Sami Paila, said late Sunday the trail dragged for "dozens of kilometers ... if not almost 100 kilometers."

"Our current understanding is that the drag mark in question

is that of the anchor of the Eagle S vessel. We have been able to clarify this matter through underwater research," Paila told Finnish national TV broadcaster Yle.

On Saturday, the vessel was escorted to inner anchorage in the vicinity of the port of Porvoo, to facilitate the investigation, officials said. It is being probed under criminal charges of aggravated interference with telecommunications, aggravated vandalism and aggravated regulatory offense.

European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said Monday that "sabotage in Europe has increased" since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

She vowed that the EU would "take stronger measures to counter the risks posed" by vessels of Russia's shadow fleet.

## Texas AG: White House to stop selling border material

The Dallas Morning News

The Biden administration has agreed to not sell any further U.S.-Mexico border wall materials over the next 30 days, the Texas Attorney General's office said.

The administration also has to provide documentation showing that it has not violated an injunction that requires the federal government to continue the wall construction using the roughly \$1.4 billion allocation from Congress, according to Friday's announcement. The decision came from U.S. District Judge Drew B. Tipton, who was appointed by President-elect Donald Trump during his first term.

Earlier this month, Trump and several Texas Republicans expressed outrage that the Biden administration was

selling unused border wall parts, pointing to a report by the conservative Daily Wire that said the federal government was racing to offload them before Trump takes office.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and Land Commissioner Dawn Buckingham then asked for a federal judge to intervene.

"Texas is going to court to prevent any border security materials from being unlawfully sold and to find out the truth about what the federal government may be doing to subvert border wall construction," Paxton said in a Dec. 17 news release.

The sales followed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, which was signed into law last December.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### 2 die from exposure while on hunt for Sasquatch

**WA** STEVENSON — Two Oregon men were found dead in a Washington state forest after they failed to return from a trip to look for Sasquatch, authorities said.

The 59-year-old and 37-year-old appear to have died from exposure, the Skamania County Sheriff's Office said via Facebook. The weather and the men's lack of preparedness led the office to draw that conclusion, it said.

Sasquatch is a folkloric beast thought by some to roam the forests, particularly in the Pacific Northwest.

The two men were found in a heavily wooded area of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, which is about 150 miles northwest of Portland.

A family member reported them missing at around 1 a.m. on Christmas Day after they failed to return from a Christmas Eve outing.

### Carbon monoxide leak likely killed family of four

**NH** WAKEFIELD — A Massachusetts family of four were found dead on Christmas Day at their lake house in New Hampshire after their propane heating system appeared to have malfunctioned, poisoning them with carbon monoxide gas overnight, authorities said.

Matthew Goldstein, 52, was an elementary school teacher in Chestnut Hill and his wife, Lyla Goldstein, 54, was a project manager at Microsoft. Their daughters, Valerie, 22, who was

also a teacher, and Violet, 19, a college student, also died in the accident. The family lived in Newton, Mass., and were visiting New Hampshire over the Christmas holidays.

Investigators said they haven't yet figured out what caused the apparent leak of carbon monoxide from the propane gas heating system.

New Hampshire Fire Marshal Sean Toomey said there were no carbon monoxide alarms found in the home, and he urged people to install and maintain such alarms.

### Man accused of attacking reporter, touting Trump

**CO** DENVER — A Colorado man is facing possible bias-motivated charges for allegedly attacking a television news reporter after demanding to know whether he was a citizen, saying "This is Trump's America now," according to court documents.

Patrick Thomas Egan, 39, was arrested in Grand Junction, Colo., after police said he followed KKCO/KJCT reporter Ja'Ronn Alex's vehicle for around 40 miles from the Delta area. Alex told police that he believed he had been followed and attacked because he is Pacific Islander.

After arriving in Grand Junction, Egan, who was driving a taxi, pulled up next to Alex at a stoplight and, according to an arrest affidavit, said something to the effect of: "Are you even a U.S. citizen? This is Trump's America now! I'm a Marine and I took an oath to protect this country from people like you!"

Alex, who had been out re-

porting, then drove back to his news station in the city. After he got out of his vehicle, Egan chased Alex as he ran toward the station's door and demanded to see his identification, according to the documents. Egan then tackled Alex, put him in a headlock and "began to strangle him," the affidavit said.

### 2 drone shows halted after injury in other show

**FL** ORLANDO — A theme park resort and a huge hotel in central Florida either have stopped using drones or canceled their drone-based shows after several drones collided and fell from the sky during a separate holiday celebration in downtown Orlando. The accident injured a boy who required surgery.

Universal Orlando said it was pausing the drone component of its "CineSational: A Symphonic Spectacular" show, while Orlando World Center Marriott posted that it was canceling its scheduled drone shows during the holiday week.

The halt in using drones follows the accident when drones fell into a crowd of thousands of people watching a holiday show at Lake Eola Park in downtown Orlando. A 7-year-old boy was hit in the chest by a drone and required heart surgery, according to his mother.

### Victor Wembanyama plays 1-on-1 chess with fans

**NY** NEW YORK — Victor Wembanyama went to a park in New York City and played 1-on-1 with fans. He even lost a couple of games.

Not in basketball, though.

Wemby was playing chess. And this wasn't on a whim: He knows how to play and even brought his own chess set.

Before the San Antonio Spurs left New York for a flight to Minnesota, Wembanyama put out the call on social media: "Who wants to meet me at the SW corner of Washington Square park to play chess? Im there," Wembanyama wrote.

Wembanyama was there for an hour in the rain, from about 10-11 a.m. He played four games, winning two and losing two — he told Bleacher Report afterward that both of the losses were to professional chess players — before departing to catch the Spurs' flight.

### Winner announced for \$1.22B lottery jackpot

**CA** COTTONWOOD — At least one Mega Millions player has plenty of dough to ring in the New Year after drawing the winning number. After three months without anyone winning the top prize in the lottery, a ticket worth an estimated \$1.22 billion was sold in California for the drawing, according to the Mega Millions website.

The California Lottery said the winning ticket was sold at Circle K (Sunshine Food and Gas) on Rhonda Road in Cottonwood, about 150 miles north of Sacramento. The winning ticket matched the white balls 3, 7, 37, 49, 55 and the gold Mega Ball 6. Ishar Gill, a son of the store owner, said the winning ticket was "a blessing" for the small rural town. The identity of the winner or winners was not immediately known.

— From wire reports

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# Daniels sends Commanders to playoffs

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Jayden Daniels felt tired. Tired from a game that went well past 60 minutes. Tired from running all over the field for the better part of three-plus hours.

It was all worth it after carrying the Washington Commanders into the playoffs.

Daniels connected with Zach Ertz in overtime for his third touchdown pass of the game to clinch a playoff spot by beating the Atlanta Falcons 30-24 in overtime Sunday night in a back-and-forth prime-time showdown between highly drafted rookie quarterbacks.

"The fan base waited a long time for this," Daniels said. "I really can't put into words how much it means to them and how much it means to me to be able to go out there and lead this franchise and this team to opportunities like that."

Daniels ran for a season-high 127 yards, including 42 in OT,

and completed 24 of 36 passes for 227 yards and had two TD passes to Ertz and another to Olamide Zaccheaus to make the playoffs in his rookie year.

In his latest comeback performance in a season full of them, the No. 2 overall pick in the draft in April shook off an interception and a 10-point halftime deficit and led the winning drive in overtime that was capped with the 2-yard pass to Ertz.

"You want to be in these moments," said veteran linebacker Bobby Wagner, who saw a look in Daniels' eyes late in the game that foreshadowed another winning performance. "Him getting hit and making big plays, his confidence, his demeanor never changes. You know that he knows he's going to make a play, and everybody on the sideline and on the field believes he's going to make a play."

The Commanders (11-5) could move up to the sixth seed in the NFC and set up a wild-

card round game at Tampa Bay or the Los Angeles Rams if they win their regular-season finale at Dallas. They otherwise would be seventh and visit division-rival Philadelphia unless Green Bay loses to Chicago.

The Falcons (8-8) lost control of their chances of winning the NFC South and ensuring a home playoff game. They now need to beat Carolina and for the Buccaneers to lose to New Orleans to qualify altogether.

"Control what your controllables are," Atlanta coach Raheem Morris said. "Go out there and win our football game. That's all we can do. Everything else is out of our control. Those things don't matter. Thing we got to do is prepare for this football game. Prepare for the Panthers."

Atlanta was in control for the first half of the game, gashing Washington's defense with the running game until abandoning it. Bijan Robinson had 82 yards

and two touchdown runs on 13 carries until a minute was left in the second quarter — but had just 8 yards the rest of the way.

"We just went back to our technique and fundamentals: Keep it simple for stopping the run and keep it on the passing game," Commanders linebacker Frankie Luvu said.

Penix did his best to try to carry the Falcons back after they fell behind 24-17 late. The eighth pick in the draft made his second professional start and finished a 12-play, 68-yard drive with a touchdown pass to Kyle Pitts to tie it with 1:19 left.

A throw from Penix to Drake London drew a pass interference penalty with 2 seconds left in regulation and gave Riley Patterson a chance at a go-ahead field goal. But Patterson's 56-yard attempt fell short as time expired and Atlanta never got the ball back.

Penix finished 19-for-35 for 223 yards and a TD pass.

## Another Darnold gem helps Vikings hold off Packers

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Vikings were ready to start their postgame ritual in honor of a ninth consecutive victory before realizing Sam Darnold was still missing from the raucous locker room because he was finishing his interview with the TV broadcasting crew.

He was well worth the wait.

Darnold added another exploit to his career-altering season, passing for a personal-best 377 yards and three touchdowns as the Vikings hung on to beat the Green Bay Packers 27-25 on Sunday and moved tantalizingly close to the NFC's top seed for the playoffs.

"Just to see how he's ultimately been able to maximize everything about his opportunity, our football team loves him for it," coach Kevin O'Connell said.

"I've had an absolute blast coaching him."

The Vikings (14-2) set up a final-week showdown in Detroit next Sunday night for both the NFC North title and the first-round-bye-plus-home-field-advantage package that comes with the best record in the conference, finishing 7-1 at U.S. Bank Stadium where their blitz-fueled defense has fed well off the deafening crowd.

"Playing here, our opponents feel that," said linebacker Blake Cashman, who had a team-leading 11 tackles and 1½ sacks to help keep Packers quarterback Jordan Love from ever finding a rhythm.

Darnold hit Jalen Nailor, Jordan Addison and Cam Akers for scores to raise his passing touchdown total to 35, the fourth-most in NFL history by a

player in his debut season with a team.

When Darnold jogged into the locker room after his interview with, of all people, Tom Brady, the seven-time Super Bowl champion and now the lead analyst on Fox, he was doused in water by his teammates and hoisted in the air.

"It was just mayhem," Darnold said, smiling wide. "I think I blacked out when Aaron Jones grabbed me and lifted me up."

Love's only touchdown pass for the Packers (11-5) came with 2:18 left, a 3-yard toss to Malik Heath that trimmed their deficit to two points and reignited the "Go Pack Go!" chants from the green-clad fans mixed in among the purple in another classic edition of this divisional rivalry.

"I can't sit up here and say, 'Yeah, we're on the same level,'

if we ain't beat them," safety Xavier McKinney said. "We've got to be more on our details. We've got to play cleaner. We've got to start faster."

Josh Jacobs and Emanuel Wilson rushed for second-half touchdowns to fuel the late surge by the Packers.

But with the score too close for comfort and the Packers holding all their timeouts before the two-minute warning, O'Connell didn't hesitate to trust Darnold to win it.

Darnold ran bootlegs for completions for two vital first downs, one to fullback C.J. Ham and one on third-and-2 that Akers snagged just before it hit the turf to force the Packers to use their final timeout.

"We can be aggressive, but he's still going to be a great decision-maker," O'Connell said.

# Barkley tops 2,000, Eagles clinch East

*Associated Press*

PHILADELPHIA — Saquon Barkley rushed for 167 yards to top 2,000 this season, backup quarterback Kenny Pickett ran and threw for scores before exiting with injured ribs, and the Philadelphia Eagles clinched the NFC East by routing the Dallas Cowboys 41-7.

Barkley has 2,005 yards and needs 101 in next week's mostly meaningless regular-season finale to top Eric Dickerson and his 2,105 yards for the Los Angeles Rams in 1984.

Barkley left the game after a 23-yard run in the fourth quarter got him past 2,000.

"We definitely knew what the number was to at least get 2,000," Barkley said. "We weren't leaving this field without at least accomplishing that. That's not the words from me, that's the words from the guys up front."

Whether Dickerson likes it or not — and the Hall of Famer made clear last week he does not — Barkley is coming for the record next Sunday against the New York Giants.

Well, maybe.

The Eagles have clinched the NFC East and at least the No. 2 seed in the conference, making that game mostly meaningless. Coach Nick Sirianni could opt to rest Barkley to protect him from injury ahead of the playoffs.

"Whatever his decision is, I'm all for it," Barkley said. "If his mindset is, go out and try it, we'll go out and try it. If his mindset is, let's rest and get ready for this run, I'll all for it, too."

Sirianni simply said, "We'll see."

The Eagles (13-3) led 24-7 in the third quarter when Pickett was drilled by defensive end Micah Parsons, ending his first start in place of the concussed Jalen Hurts. Tanner McKee, a career third-stringer, entered the game and the Eagles finished the drive with a field goal.

McKee later threw two TD passes, a 20-yarder to A.J. Brown and a 25-yarder to DeVonta Smith, in front of a roaring crowd delighted to watch the Eagles dominate their fiercest rival to wrap up the division title and at least the No. 2 seed in the NFC.

**Bills 40, Jets 14:** Josh Allen threw two touchdown passes and ran for another score, and host Buffalo clinched the AFC's No. 2 seed with a rout of unraveling and undisciplined New York.

The Bills put the game away by capitalizing on two Jets turnovers and scoring three touchdowns over a 5:01 span in the closing minutes of the third quarter. Buffalo's defense forced three takeaways overall and sacked Aaron Rodgers four times, including a 2-yard loss for a safety in the second quarter.

Allen had a short and efficient outing, finishing 16-for-27 for 182 yards with a 30-yard TD pass to Amari Cooper and a 14-yarder to Keon Coleman before giving way to backup Mitchell Trubisky with Buffalo leading 33-0 through three quarters. Trubisky piled on by completing a 69-yard touchdown pass to practice squad call-up Tyrell Shavers 2:23 into the fourth quarter.

Allen's two-TD passing outing was the 64th of his career to match Peyton Manning for the third most in a player's first seven NFL seasons. Patrick Mahomes holds the record with 67 two-TD outings in that span, followed by Dan Marino's 65.

Allen also became the NFL's first player with five consecutive 40-TD seasons, while his 1-yard score was the 65th rushing TD of his career, matching the team record held by Thurman Thomas.

**Buccaneers 48, Panthers 14:** Baker Mayfield threw for 359 yards and five touchdowns to help host Tampa Bay keep its

division and playoff hopes alive.

Tampa Bay's fifth win in the past six weeks nudged the first-place Bucs (9-7) a game ahead of Atlanta for the best record in the NFC South after the Falcons lost later Sunday night at Washington.

Mayfield threw TD passes of 2 and 1 yards to Mike Evans, and Tampa Bay produced points on five straight first-half possessions. Jalen McMillan scored on receptions of 10 and 16 yards, linebacker J.J. Russell returned a blocked punt for a third-quarter TD and rookie Bucky Irving had another big game against Carolina with 120 yards rushing on 20 carries and four receptions for 77 yards.

Irving went over 1,000 yards for the season (1,033) despite primarily being used as a backup to Rachaad White.

**Raiders 25, Saints 10:** Aidan O'Connell passed for two touchdowns, tight end Brock Bowers broke two rookie NFL records, and visiting Las Vegas won for just the fourth time this season over struggling New Orleans.

Bowers' seven catches for 77 yards gave him 108 receptions for 1,144 yards this season, eclipsing Mike Ditka's 1961 rookie tight end mark of 1,067 yards receiving and Puka Nacua's 2023 mark of 105 catches by a rookie at any position.

Ameer Abdullah rushed for 115 yards for the Raiders (4-12) — the journeyman's first 100-yard game in his 10 NFL seasons.

**Jaguars 20, Titans 13:** Mac Jones threw two touchdown passes, including one to stand-out rookie Brian Thomas Jr., and host Jacksonville beat Tennessee in the rain to sweep the season series for the fourth time in 30 years.

Jones completed 15 of 22 passes for 174 yards, with most of them going to Thomas. The first-round draft pick from LSU finished with seven receptions for 91 yards. His 11-yard TD

catch with 7:05 remaining gave him his eighth game with at least 60 yards and a score, tying him with Hall of Famer Randy Moss for the most by a rookie in NFL history.

**Giants 45, Colts 33:** New York snapped a franchise-record 10-game losing streak and ended visiting Indianapolis' slim playoff hopes as Drew Lock threw four touchdown passes and ran for another in a victory.

New York earned its first home win of the season and it no longer has control of the No. 1 overall pick in the draft.

Lock sandwiched touchdown passes of 31 and 59 yards to Malik Nabers around TD passes of 32 yards to Darius Slayton and 5 yards to Wan'Dale Robinson in leading the Giants (3-13) to their first win since beating Seattle on Oct. 6.

Ihmir Smith-Marsette had a 100-yard return on the second-half kickoff on a day the league's worst offense set a season high for points.

Jonathan Taylor scored on runs of 3 and 26 yards for Indianapolis (7-9).

**Dolphins 20, Browns 3:** Tyler Huntley scrambled for a touchdown and threw for one while starting for Tua Tagovailoa, and visiting Miami stayed in the playoff race heading into their season finale with a win over Cleveland.

With Tagovailoa sidelined by a hip injury, Huntley did enough to keep the Dolphins (8-8) alive with one game left.

Miami (8-8) needs to win next weekend at the New York Jets and hope the Denver Broncos lose at home to Kansas City to get a wild-card berth. Unfortunately for the Dolphins, quarterback Patrick Mahomes and many of the top-seeded Chiefs' starters are expected to rest.

Huntley finished 22-for-26 for 225 yards and didn't have any turnovers in his fourth start this season.

# Crosby moves past Lemieux for Penguins assists record

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby broke Mario Lemieux's franchise career record for assists on Michael Bunting's power-play goal as the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the New York Islanders 3-2 on Sunday night.

Crosby has 1,034 assists, good for 12th in NHL history. Only three players — Ray Bourque, Wayne Gretzky and Steve Yzerman — have more assists with one team. Crosby, 37, has played 1,310-regular-season games. Lemieux played 915.

Evgeni Malkin added the deciding power-play goal in the third for Pittsburgh, which has 14 goals with the man advantage in its past 13 games. Anthony Beauvillier also scored to help the Penguins win for the seventh time in their past eight home games.

Alex Nedeljkovic made 29 saves in his first start since Dec. 17.

Kris Letang missed the game because of a lower-body injury, and defenseman Nathan Clurman made his NHL debut.

**Canadiens 5, Lightning 2:** Jake Evans scored for the career-high fifth consecutive game as surging Montreal won at Tampa Bay.

Christian Dvorak, Joel Armia, Brendan Gallagher and Alex Newhook also scored to help the Canadiens win for the fifth time in six games. Sam Montembeault made 21 saves.

Nikita Kucherov and Brandon Hagel scored for Tampa Bay.

**Sabres 4, Blues 2:** Jason Zucker scored a tiebreaking power-play goal with 9:30 remaining and visiting Buffalo notched its third straight victory by beating St. Louis.

Jiri Kulich extended Buffalo's lead with a breakaway goal that went between Blues goalie

Jordan Binnington's legs with 3:41 to play.

Tage Thompson had a goal and an assist against his former team as the Sabres won in St. Louis for the second time in 12 years to sweep the season series. Zucker had a goal and an assist, and Jack Quinn had two assists for Buffalo.

**Ducks 5, Oilers 3:** Ryan Strome scored with 2:36 remaining as Anaheim rallied from a two-goal deficit in the second period to defeat visiting Edmonton.

Strome's goal, his sixth of the season, originally wasn't called, but it was reversed after a review. Strome's shot was entirely over the goal line before Edmonton goalie Calvin Pickard could stop it with his skate.

Mason McTavish added an empty-net goal.

**Red Wings 4, Capitals 2:** Patrick Kane reached the 1,300-point mark and Todd McLellan won for the first time as Detroit's coach in its victory over visiting Washington.

Kane, who needed two points to reach that mark, had a power-play goal and assist during Detroit's four-goal first period.

Alex DeBrincat scored two goals and Lucas Raymond added another as the Red Wings snapped a four-game losing streak. Alex Lyon made 26 saves.

McLellan replaced Derek Lalonde prior to Friday's loss to Toronto.

Alex Ovechkin scored for the second consecutive game after missing the previous 16 due to a fractured fibula. The Capitals star forward is 25 goals shy of passing Wayne Gretzky's NHL record of 894.

**Golden Knights 3, Flames 0:** Brett Howden scored his 15th goal of the season and Ilya Samsonov stopped 31 shots as Vegas

defeated visiting Calgary.

Howden redirected defenseman Alex Pietrangolo's shot from the top of the slot late in the second period and is now tied with Ivan Barbashev for the team lead in goals. Howden has scored a goal in four of the last five games.

The Golden Knights have won six straight, the longest active win streak in the NHL, while improving to 25-8-3 on the year. They own a 13-2-1 record against Pacific Division opponents.

**Senators 3, Wild 1:** Josh Norris broke a tie on a power play with 7:18 left, Leevi Merilainen made 30 saves in his fifth NHL game and Ottawa won at Minnesota.

Ottawa has won seven of its past nine games, while the Wild have lost five of their past seven. The Senators won in Minnesota for the first time since 2016.

**Stars 5, Blackhawks 1:** Matt Duchene and Jamie Benn each had a goal and two assists as visiting Dallas beat Chicago.

Jason Robertson, Evgenii Dadonov and Wyatt Johnston each had a goal and an assist for Dallas, which had lost three of four. Jake Oettinger made 24 saves.

Chicago dropped its fourth consecutive game. It lost three of four in its season series against Dallas.

**Kings 5, Flyers 4:** Anze Kopitar scored twice, Adrian Kempe had a goal and an assist, and Los Angeles got its seventh straight home win by beating Philadelphia.

Kevin Fiala and Warren Foegele also scored for the Kings, who trailed 4-2 midway through the second period before rebounding to sweep a back-to-back after defeating recent playoff nemesis Edmonton in overtime on Saturday. David Rittich made 17 saves.

## Six ejected in Heat win

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Tyler Herro scored 27 points before being one of six people ejected after a fight in the final minute of the Miami Heat's 104-100 victory over the Houston Rockets on Sunday night.

Herro was thrown to the ground by the Rockets' Amen Thompson with 35 seconds left and the Heat leading 99-94. Players and coaches from both benches then came onto the court.

Thompson grabbed Herro by the jersey and tossed him, with referee Marc Davis describing it as Thompson "body slams Herro." Both players were thrown out along with Rockets guard Jalen Green, coach Ime Udoka and assistant coach Ben Sullivan. Terry Rozier was also ejected for Miami.

Houston led 92-85 after Fred VanVleet's layup with 8:10 to play, but the Rockets missed their next 11 shots, allowing Miami to tie it when Herro found Haywood Highsmith for a 3-pointer with 4:47 to play.

Herro's jumper with 1:56 left put the Heat on top for good.

**Magic 102, Nets 101:** Cole Anthony drove for a layup with 0.2 seconds left to complete visiting Orlando's 17-point fourth-quarter comeback against Brooklyn.

**Pacers 123, Celtics 114:** Tyrese Haliburton had 31 points and visiting Indiana rebounded from a 37-point loss to Boston two nights earlier.

**Hawks 136, Raptors 107:** Trae Young scored 34 points and had 10 assists, De'Andre Hunter scored 22 points and visiting Atlanta routed Toronto for its fourth straight win.

**Thunder 130, Grizzlies 106:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points against Memphis and host Oklahoma City won its 11th straight game.

**Timberwolves 112, Spurs 110:** Donte DiVincenzo scored 26 points as host Minnesota defeated San Antonio.