

STARS AND STRIPES®

Monday, January 21, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

ISIS again attacks US troops in Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT — An Islamic State suicide bomber targeted a joint convoy of U.S. and allied Kurdish forces in northern Syria on Monday, marking the second attack against U.S. troops in less than a week and further highlighting the dangers surrounding U.S. plans to withdraw forces after a declaration that the extremist group had been defeated.

U.S. military Col. Sean Ryan said there were no casualties among the U.S.-led coalition members. He added, "We can confirm a combined U.S. and Syrian partner force convoy was involved" in the suicide bomb attack.

"We will continue to review the situation and provide updates as appropriate," he said.

Monday's bombing came days after a suicide attack killed 19 people, including two U.S. servicemembers and two American civilians, in the northern Syrian town of Manbij. That bombing was the deadliest assault on U.S. troops in Syria since American forces moved into the country in 2015 and underscored the threat still posed by ISIS militants, even as President Donald Trump has claimed the group's defeat.

The extremist group claimed both attacks in statements carried by its Amaq news agency. ISIS has been driven from virtually all the territory it once held in Syria and Iraq but continues to carry out attacks in both countries.

The Kurdish Hawar news agency, based in northern Syria, said Monday's blast targeted a Syrian Kurdish checkpoint as a coalition convoy was passing near the town of Shaddadeh. It said two Kurdish fighters were lightly wounded in the blast. The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the blast killed five

Israel: Jets struck Iranian military targets in Syria

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military said its jets struck a series of Iranian military targets in Syria early Monday, an announcement that was a rare departure from Israel's yearslong policy of ambiguity regarding activities in neighboring war-torn Syria.

The military said the targets included munition storage facilities, an intelligence site and a military training camp.

The strikes were in response to a surface-to-surface rocket that Iranian forces fired toward Israel on Sunday that was intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system over a ski resort in the Golan Heights. That followed a rare Israeli daylight air raid near the Damascus International Airport.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Monday's pre-dawn strikes lasted for nearly an hour and were the most

intense Israeli attacks since May. It said 11 were killed in the strikes.

The Russian military said four Syrian troops were among those killed in airstrikes that targeted three different locations and damaged unspecified infrastructure at the Damascus airport. There were no further details on the casualties or their nationalities.

Lt. Col. Jonathan Conricus, an Israeli military spokesman, said the Iranian missile attack that prompted the strong Israeli response was "premeditated." Iranian forces in Syria fired the midrange surface-to-surface missile toward Israel from the Damascus area — a missile he said had been smuggled into Syria specifically for that purpose.

Conricus declined to further identify the type of missile but said it hadn't been used in any of the internal fighting of the civil war and had "no business" being in Syria.

people and wounded others.

In a Dec. 19 tweet announcing the withdrawal from Syria, Trump declared, "We have defeated ISIS in Syria, my only reason for being there during the Trump Presidency."

He said the troops would begin coming home "now." That plan triggered immediate pushback from military leaders and led to the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Over the past month, Trump

and others have appeared to adjust the timeline, and U.S. officials have suggested it will likely take several months to safely withdraw the approximately 2,000 U.S. troops from Syria.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a leading U.S. voice on foreign policy and close ally of the president, said during a visit Saturday to Turkey that an American withdrawal from Syria that had not been thought

through would lead to "chaos" and "an Iraq on steroids." Graham urged Trump not to get out without a plan and said the goal of destroying ISIS militants in Syria had not yet been accomplished.

A statement from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's office said he and Trump spoke on the telephone early Monday about the town of Manbij and Erdogan told his American counterpart that Turkey is "ready to take over the security" of the town "without losing time."

The fate of the Syrian town, controlled by U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish fighters whom Turkey considers terrorists, has been a source of tension between Ankara and Washington. Turkey insists on the withdrawal of the Syrian Kurdish militia, which liberated Manbij from ISIS in 2016.

Erdogan also called last week's suicide attack in Manbij a "provocation meant to affect the U.S. decision to withdraw from Syria" and said the two leaders agreed their military chiefs would "speed up" consultations about a safe zone in northeastern Syria.

In a separate development on Monday, the European Union added 11 businessmen and five companies to its list of Syrians under sanctions for backing President Bashar Assad's government.

EU foreign ministers imposed travel bans and asset freezes on them, saying they "are involved in luxury estate development and other regime-backed projects, and as such support and/or benefit from the Syrian regime."

The EU sanctions list now includes 270 people and 72 "entities," which are usually companies, organizations or agencies.

Unclaimed vets receive proper burials

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — When the flags were removed from the caskets and folded with military precision, there were no family members there to receive them.

So the banners were passed, hand-to-hand, through the crowd.

Some mourners wept as they clutched the flags briefly. Others kissed them. But the three veterans laid to rest on a rainy Memphis morning were strangers to most of those who gathered to honor their memory.

The service was part of a national effort by funeral homes, medical examiners, state and federal veterans' affairs departments and local veterans' groups to pay final respects to members of the military whose bodies were not claimed by any relatives. Since 2000, Dignity

Memorial and other funeral homes in more than 30 cities have organized about 3,000 funerals for soldiers, sailors and Marines who died alone but still deserved a dignified funeral and burial, said Jeff Berry, Dignity's general manager in Knoxville.

Army soldiers Arnold M. Klechka, 71, and Wesley Russell, 76, and Marine Charles B. Fox, 60, were laid to rest in a service attended by about 700 people at West Tennessee Veterans Cemetery in Memphis on Thursday. There was a gun salute, and a bagpiper played "Amazing Grace."

Organizing the funerals, which are fairly commonplace in Tennessee, requires a lot of teamwork.

Berry said the process usually begins with county medical examiners or local coroners, who contact state or national

veterans' cemeteries with names of people whose bodies have gone unclaimed. They typically were either homeless or had no surviving relatives to claim them.

Some have had surviving family members who did not want to claim them.

The cemeteries determine whether the servicemembers were honorably discharged. If they were, medical examiners or the cemeteries then contact Dignity, which is owned by Service Corporation International, or one of its partner funeral homes. A funeral director then sets up the memorial service, and the funeral home covers the cost, Berry said.

Cemetery directors can file claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs for grave markers or placards for columbariums, according to the Tennessee Department of Vet-

erans' Services.

The VA also gives money to individuals or entities that provide burials, caskets and transportation to cemeteries for unclaimed deceased vets.

Memorial services are publicized through news outlets, veterans' groups like the American Legion, or social media. Honor Guard and other active military members attend, but it's the strangers who come out of respect for the military and the dead who bring dignity to the occasion.

During the Memphis ceremony, funeral director Gary Taylor thanked those who showed up.

Then, he spoke directly to the caskets.

"Today, we salute you," Taylor said. "Today we all claim you as our own."

Stalemate keeps government shutdown going

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Congress takes up legislation this week to reopen the federal government after a new offer from President Donald Trump, but divergent efforts in the House and Senate look destined to go nowhere, leaving the month-old stalemate no closer to resolution.

The Senate, led by Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., will take up a proposal announced by Trump on Saturday to reopen the government — trading temporary protections for young undocumented immigrants and other immigration provisions in exchange for \$5.7 billion in border wall funding. Democrats have rejected the proposal, which would fund the government through the rest of the fiscal year and disaster relief efforts, so it appears unlikely to garner the 60 votes necessary to advance.

The House, led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., will

pass a series of spending bills that would reopen portions of the government that have nothing to do with the wall. The legislation will include some security priorities supported by both parties, including a total of about \$1 billion for immigration judges and ports of entry along the border.

But the House legislation is dead on arrival in the Senate, where McConnell has made clear he will not advance any spending bills Trump won't sign.

The partial government shutdown, already the longest in U.S. history, entered its 31st day on Monday.

The Trump administration has taken certain steps to blunt the impact of the shutdown, effects of which will nevertheless multiply over time, including at airports where Transportation Security Administration employees are increasingly calling out sick.

The TSA said that as of Sunday, 10 percent of employees are taking unscheduled absences, compared with 3.1 percent a year ago.

Without action by Congress and Trump, hundreds of thousands of federal employees are also set to miss their second paycheck Friday. On Sunday, the National Governors Association sent a letter to congressional leaders saying some states are beginning to run out of money to pay federal welfare benefits used by 1 million adults and 2.5 million children, with North Carolina expected to exhaust its funding in early February.

Trump's proposal Saturday represented his first attempt since the shutdown began to offer a broader deal that would involve both border security and other parts of the immigration system. The president offered three years of deportation protections for undocu-

mented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children and had qualified for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, which the president terminated earlier in his tenure. (A federal court has delayed the end of the program.)

Democrats rejected the proposal from the start, saying that the government cannot be held hostage and must be reopened before negotiations on immigration policy can begin. They added they would not trade a temporary measure for a permanent wall and pointed out that Trump was now only offering to temporarily prolong a program he tried to kill.

Trump also offered to back off plans to end a program, known as a temporary protected status, that has allowed hundreds of thousands of people to come to the United States after fleeing natural disasters and violent conflict back home.

Shutdown and disunity are themes of MLK celebration in Atlanta

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A commemorative service for the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. that was nearly imperiled by the federal government shutdown was held Monday morning in Atlanta at a church called King's "spiritual home."

King's daughter, the Rev. Bernice King, said in her remarks that the service at Ebenezer Baptist Church came during a moment of crisis in America while condemning gridlock and partisanship that led to the shutdown.

"Our humanity is literally on the verge of digressing to two Americas and becoming the dis-United State of America," she said.

King also slammed what she called "the powerful resurgence of nationalistic and white supremacist ideologies" around the world.

The event was attended by Republican Sen. David Perdue,

Democratic Congresswoman Lucy McBath, and Emma Gonzalez, a survivor of the mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas high school in Parkland, Fla., in February. Perdue, who is white, recounted growing up in Georgia during segregation and praised King as an inspiring leader who changed the world through courage.

"He gave us hope during some of this country's darkest days," Perdue said. "Our country has overcome a lot, but there is much left to be done."

The annual service at Ebenezer Baptist was in doubt until Delta Air Lines gave the National Park Service a grant to reopen the site. Delta is headquartered in Atlanta. The church is part of the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park. The civil rights leader was co-pastor with his father at the church from 1960 until his assassination in 1968.

Jan. 15 would have been King's 90th birthday.

Pence links Trump's push for border wall to MLK's legacy

The Washington Post

On the eve of a holiday commemorating the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., Vice President Mike Pence seemed to liken President Donald Trump's push for a border wall to the civil rights leader's legacy.

Speaking Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation," the vice president quoted from King's "I Have a Dream" speech as he defended Trump's latest pitch to secure funding for a barrier along the United States' southern border. The budget impasse over the wall has resulted in the longest government shutdown in history and has left thousands of federal workers without pay.

"One of my favorite quotes from Dr. King was, 'Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy,'" Pence said. "You think of how he changed

America. He inspired us to change through the legislative process, to become a more perfect union.

"That's exactly what President Trump is calling on Congress to do," Pence continued. "Come to the table in the spirit of good faith. We'll secure our border. We'll reopen the government, and we'll move our nation forward as the president said yesterday to even a broader discussion about immigration reform in the months ahead."

Pence was referring to the president's latest proposal to end the partial government shutdown. On Sunday, Pence appeared on shows and defended Trump's proposal, which he said "provides a framework for ending the shutdown."

The NAACP called Pence's comments "an insult" to King's legacy.

Teen in protester confrontation: I did nothing to provoke

Associated Press

DETROIT — The student who stared and smiled at an elderly Native American protester drumming in his face outside the Lincoln Memorial in Washington as his schoolmates chanted and laughed says he did nothing to provoke the man in the videotaped confrontation and was only trying to calm the situation.

The student identified himself in an email statement Sunday evening as junior Nick Sandmann, of Covington Catholic High School in a northern Kentucky suburb of Cincinnati. An official working with the family confirmed Sandmann's identity, speaking on condition of anonymity because the source didn't want to distract from the statement.

Videos posted of the confrontation drew wide criticism on social media. "I am being called every name in the book, including a racist, and I will not stand for this moblike character assassination of my family's name," wrote Sandmann, who added that he and his parents have received death threats since video of Friday's confrontation emerged.

Both Sandmann and Nathan Phillips say they were trying to defuse tensions that were rising among three groups on a day Washington hosted both the March for Life and the Indigenous Peoples March. But video of Sandmann standing very close to Phillips, staring and at times smiling at him as Phillips sang and played a drum, gave many who watched it a different impression. Other students appeared to be laughing at the drummer, and at least one could be seen on video doing a tomahawk chop.

The dueling accounts emerged Sunday as the nation picked apart footage from dozens of cellphones that recorded

the incident on Friday amid an increasingly divided political climate fueled by a partial government shutdown over immigration policy.

Phillips had approached Sandmann, but well before that, both his group and Sandmann's, which had taken part in the anti-abortion rally, were confronted by a third group that appeared to be affiliated with the Black Hebrew Israelite movement.

Videos show members of the religious group yelling disparaging and profane insults at the students, who taunted them in return. Video also shows the Native Americans being insulted by the small religious group.

Sandmann wrote that the students were called "racists," "bigots," "white crackers" and "incest kids" by the third group. He said a teacher chaperone gave the students permission to begin their school chants "to counter the hateful things that were being shouted at our group."

One of those chants, however, is what led Phillips and Marcus Frejo, a member of the Pawnee and Seminole tribes, to approach the youths. It was a haka — a war dance of New Zealand's indigenous Maori culture, made famous by the country's national rugby team. Frejo, who is also known as Chief Quese Imc, said in a phone interview that he felt the students were mocking the dance.

Phillips, an activist described by the Indian Country Today website as an Omaha elder and Vietnam War veteran, said in an interview with the AP that he was trying to keep peace between the high school students and the religious group.

Sandmann said he heard no student chant anything beyond school spirit chants, and that he hadn't even been aware of the Native American group until Phillips approached him.

Afghan base attacked; at least 12 killed

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A Taliban assault on a military base and police training center in a province just outside the Afghan capital on Monday killed at least 12 people and wounded more than 30, officials said.

Salem Asgherkhail, head of the area's public health department, said most of those killed in the attack in Maidan Wardak province were military personnel. Some of the wounded were taken to local hospitals for treatment, while the more serious cases were sent to the capital, Kabul.

Nasrat Rahimi, deputy spokesman for the interior minister, said a suicide car

bomber struck the base before insurgents opened fire. Sharifullah Hotak, a provincial council member, said four attackers took part in the assault after the bombing, all of whom were killed in the ensuing gunbattle. Hotak said it was a training base for new recruits from the area.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement to the media.

The Taliban, who now hold sway in almost half of Afghanistan, carry out attacks on a daily basis, mainly targeting the beleaguered security forces. The violence comes amid stepped-up efforts by the United States to find a negotiated end to the 17-year war.

In a separate statement, the insurgents

said they met again with U.S. representatives to discuss "ending the invasion of Afghanistan" in talks that would continue on Tuesday.

They are meeting in Qatar, where the Taliban have a political office.

The Taliban threatened to walk away from the talks last week, accusing Washington of seeking to expand the agenda, presumably a reference to American demands that the insurgents hold direct talks with the Kabul government.

The Taliban view the Afghan government as a U.S. puppet and have long insisted they will negotiate directly only with Washington.

Ex-vicar to bishop says Vatican knew of misdeeds

Associated Press

ORAN, Argentina — The Vatican received information in 2015 and 2017 that an Argentine bishop close to Pope Francis had taken naked selfies, exhibited "obscene" behavior and had been accused of misconduct with seminarians, his former vicar general told The Associated Press, undermining Vatican claims that allegations of sexual abuse were made only a few months ago.

Francis accepted Bishop Gustavo Zanchetta's resignation in August 2017 after priests in the remote northern Argentine diocese of Oran complained about his authoritarian rule and a

former vicar, seminary rector and another prelate provided reports to the Vatican alleging abuses of power, inappropriate behavior and sexual harassment of adult seminarians, said the former vicar, the Rev. Juan Jose Manzano.

The scandal over Zanchetta, 54, is the latest to implicate Francis as he and the Catholic hierarchy as a whole face an unprecedented crisis of confidence over their mishandling of cases of clergy sexual abuse of minors and misconduct with adults.

Francis has summoned church leaders to a summit next month to chart the course forward for the universal church,

but his own actions in individual cases are increasingly in the spotlight.

The pope's decision to allow Zanchetta to resign quietly and then promote him to a new No. 2 position in one of the Vatican's most sensitive offices has raised questions again about whether Francis turned a blind eye to the misconduct of his allies or dismissed allegations against them as ideological attacks.

Manzano, Zanchetta's one-time vicar general, or top deputy, said he was one of the diocesan officials who raised the alarm about his boss in 2015 and sent the digital selfies to the Vatican.

Francis had named Zanch-

etta to Oran, a humble city some 1,025 miles northwest of Buenos Aires in Salta province, in 2013 in one of his first Argentine bishop appointments as pope.

Earlier this month, the Vatican confirmed that the new bishop of Oran had opened a preliminary canonical investigation into Zanchetta for alleged sexual abuse.

At the time of his resignation, Zanchetta had asked Francis to let him leave Oran only because he had difficult relations with its priests and was "unable to govern the clergy," Vatican spokesman Alessandro Gisotti said in the statement.

UK's May snubs Brexit delay, sticks to EU divorce

Associated Press

LONDON — Prime Minister Theresa May on Monday rejected calls to delay Britain's departure from the European Union and said her Plan B was to get her rejected Brexit deal approved by Parliament after securing changes to a contentious Irish border measure.

Outlining what she plans to do after her EU divorce deal was rejected by Parliament last week, May said she had heeded lawmakers' concerns over an

insurance policy known as the "backstop" that is intended to guarantee there are no customs checks along the border between EU member Ireland and the U.K.'s Northern Ireland after Brexit.

May said she would be "talking further this week to colleagues ... to consider how we might meet our obligations to the people of Northern Ireland and Ireland in a way that can command the greatest possible support in the House. And I will then take the conclusions

of those discussions back to the EU."

The bloc insists that it won't renegotiate the withdrawal agreement. "This is the text we all invested ourselves in," Austrian Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl said at a meeting of EU ministers in Brussels.

British lawmakers are due to debate and vote on May's revised plan — and possible amendments — on Jan. 29, exactly two months before Britain is due to leave the EU.

Opposition leader Jeremy

Corbyn, of the Labour Party, said May's Plan B was just a second attempt to push through her doomed deal. "This really does feel a bit like 'Groundhog Day,' he said, referring to the 1993 film starring Bill Murray in which a weatherman is fated to live out the same day over and over again.

Britain and the EU sealed a divorce deal in November after months of tense negotiations. But the agreement has been rejected by both sides of Britain's

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman wakes up, finds stranger on her

CT BRIDGEPORT — A Connecticut man was arrested after police alleged he broke into the home of a woman who woke up to find a naked stranger on top of her.

The Connecticut Post reported that Hiram Heredia, 35, was detained on \$300,000 bail after being charged Friday with home invasion and sexual assault.

The Bridgeport woman told police she woke up to find a man on top of her. She said she screamed and woke up her husband, who was sleeping in a bed next to her, and he chased the naked intruder out of the house and down the street before losing him.

Police said Heredia left his clothes and wallet at the scene.

Lost Army gold ring returned after 2 years

RI EAST PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island police said a U.S. Army gold ring lost by its owner two years ago has been returned.

East Providence police posted on Facebook that the ring was turned in by someone who found it. The only clue as to who owned it was the name "Ronald" inscribed on the inside.

Days later, police announced the ring had been returned to the veteran who lost it.

Police said "the owner wished to express his sincere gratitude" to all involved.

Woman reunited with cat missing for years

AK ANCHORAGE — A Wasilla woman has been reunited with a cat that disappeared more than three years ago from its home at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

The Anchorage Daily News reported that a woman at the base messaged Lynsey Ryan that a stray cat she had fed for months resembled a photo posted on Facebook missing-pets pages.

The feline was indeed Winter, the missing cat. A microchip implanted beneath its skin confirmed the identity.

Ryan, a rescue group volunteer, first met the cat when it was rescued in 2014 from a Houston home. She fostered the cat before finding it was a good fit for her home at the base.

Painting of Virgin Mary sparks battle

FL BRADENTON — A legal battle is brewing between the managers of a mobile home park and a Florida woman who put in a painting of the Virgin Mary to replace her window.

The Bradenton Herald reported that last year, Millie Francis, 85, replaced the front window in her mobile home with a wood painting that depicts Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe. The property managers asked that it be taken down.

Now, attorneys for the managers want to take the case to arbitration. The newspaper reported that the park management is criticizing Francis for negative publicity surrounding the dispute.

Francis says the park managers are being "anti-Catholic."

Cruelty investigated as horses found dead

NC RALEIGH — Local North Carolina authorities are investigating animal cruelty after more than 20 horses were found dead.

Multiple news outlets reported that Wake County Sheriff's Office and animal control

workers were at a home south of Raleigh late Friday to remove the dead animals, which also included a dog.

Wake County sheriff's spokesman Eric Curry said he expected necropsies would be performed on several horses to determine why they died.

Gwen Roberts, who runs a therapeutic horse riding center near where the dead animals were discovered, said she and a concerned neighbor found the dead horses in small pens on the abandoned property.

Man pleads guilty to poaching ring charges

WA STEVENSON — A man implicated in a massive Pacific Northwest poaching ring has pleaded guilty to 15 charges related to illegally hunting big game with dogs and leaving the corpses to rot.

The Daily News reported that William Haynes, 25, of Longview, pleaded guilty to the charges including five felonies Thursday in Skamania County Superior Court.

Prosecutors say Haynes was part of a poaching ring that hunted year-round for black bears with hounds and left their carcasses.

The prosecution and defense agreed to recommend a year-long jail sentence for Haynes, but sentencing was delayed until after he testifies in an Oregon case involving another alleged poacher.

Court rejects appeal over abandoned cats

HI HONOLULU — The Hawaii State Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by a woman ordered to pay a fine for abandoning kittens at a park.

Susan Owen must pay \$150

under a 2016 pet animal desertion law. Owen took her case to the state's high court after an appeals court upheld a judge's guilty verdict against her.

The Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported that Owen told the Hawaii Intermediate Court of Appeals the kittens were not pets because they were not domesticated.

County to build lanes just for Amish buggies

IN WAKARUSA — A northern Indiana county with a large Amish population is moving ahead with plans to add lanes along local roads just for horse-drawn buggies.

Elkhart County Commissioners voted earlier this month in favor of building the buggy lanes.

Commissioner Mike Yoder told WSBT-TV that the lanes are needed because of recent accidents, some of them deadly, involving buggies.

Yoder said nearly 3 miles of buggy lanes are planned along a county road near Wakarusa and state routes 19 and 119. He said the roads will be widened for the buggies-only lanes.

Teen shot playing Russian roulette

OH AKRON — Police said a 17-year-old boy was shot in the head while playing Russian roulette in Ohio.

Authorities said the Louisville teen was injured at a home in Akron while playing with a 16-year-old boy from Green and a 20-year-old man from Akron when he was shot once in the head. He was hospitalized in grave condition.

Police are working to determine if the teen shot himself or if he was shot by one of the other two participating.

From wire reports

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Brady leads Pats back to Super Bowl

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Tom Brady and the New England Patriots did what they've done for the better part of two decades.

Make plays with the game on the line.

The most accomplished quarterback in NFL history led the Patriots downfield in overtime, surgically converting a trio of third-and-10s, and gave Rex Burkhead a chance to score the touchdown that gave New England a 37-31 victory over the Kansas City Chiefs in the AFC championship game Sunday night.

It was the 12th time in Brady's postseason career that he engineered a game-winning drive, and this one came in the face of all those critics who claimed the 41-year-old quarterback was nearing the end.

That the Patriots' dynasty was about to be usurped by the up-and-coming Chiefs.

"He's been there so many times before it's like second nature to him," said Burkhead, who also scored a touchdown in a back-and-forth fourth quarter. "He's had the pressure, he's been in those moments before and all your trust and confidence is in him to get the job done, which he did."

The Patriots led 14-0 at halftime, but

watched as Patrick Mahomes and the NFL's highest-scoring offense roared back to take a 21-17 lead with 7:45 left in the fourth quarter.

Brady and his veteran playmakers got down to business.

He first led a 10-play, 75-yard drive that Sony Michel capped with a 10-yard run on fourth down to retake the lead. Then, after the Chiefs jumped back ahead on Damien Williams' TD run, Brady led the Pats downfield with a crucial third down completion to Rob Gronkowski to set up Burkhead's score.

The Chiefs managed to get the field goal they needed to force overtime, but the Patriots won the coin toss and defensive lineman Trey Flowers knew that the game was all but over.

"I mean, I was ready to go out there if we had to," Flowers said with a grin, "but you know, [Brady] put it away for us. It's just a blessing."

Now the Patriots (13-5) are off to Atlanta to face the Los Angeles Rams, who survived their own overtime thriller in New Orleans thanks in part to a blown call by the officials.

"I can't say enough about the effort that

our players gave today, and the coaching staff, just an awesome job by all of them," Patriots coach Bill Belichick said. "They deserve it, and they earned it."

As for the Chiefs? Well, another offseason begins in heartache.

Mahomes capped a masterful first year as the starter with a dazzling second half, throwing three touchdown passes and leading his team back time after time. But he rued a slow start that put the Chiefs in a 14-0 halftime hole, and an overtime in which he never got a chance with the ball.

"I thought if we got the chance we'd score," he said.

Chiefs coach Andy Reid likewise lamented an opportunity to scribble over a series of postseason letdowns on his own résumé. His defense, which had struggled all season, crumbled down the stretch, and a team that won its third straight AFC West title was left trying to get over the hump.

"This gave us a little of what we have looking forward to us in the future, and that's where we'll go when we're done achieving here," Reid said. "And it's a bright future. We have great players. And we'll get over the hump here, the big hump, that's this game here."

Rams top Saints to complete remarkable rise

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — An egregious mistake by the refs overshadowed the Los Angeles Rams' moment of triumph.

Too bad.

This is one amazing L.A. story.

For all the debate stirred by a blatant penalty that wasn't called in the closing minutes of the NFC championship game, the Rams thoroughly earned their 26-23 overtime victory over the New Orleans Saints on Sunday.

Playing in one of the NFL's most intimidating road environments, the Rams rallied from an early 13-0 deficit. With the clock winding down, they drove for a tying field goal. And, finally, they came up with a huge interception in overtime to set up Greg Zuerlein's 57-yard field goal — the longest kick ever to win a playoff game.

"We get to play in the Super Bowl," quarterback Jared Goff

said, "and we deserve it."

No doubt.

Just three seasons after moving back to Southern California from St. Louis, the Rams completed a remarkable rise to prominence, led by their 32-year-old wunderkind of a coach, Sean McVay, and the youngest QB ever to win an NFC title. The next stop is Atlanta, where they'll face the five-time champion New England Patriots in the Feb. 3 Super Bowl.

"We have a lot of respect for the Saints, but there was an expectation, there was a belief that we were coming in here not to just compete with them but to win the football game," McVay said. "We knew it was going to be a great challenge, but the guys stayed the course."

Of course, this game will long be remembered for the call that wasn't on Drew Brees' pass to Tommylee Lewis inside the 5-yard line.

Beaten badly on the play, Rams cornerback Nickell Robey-Coleman leveled Lewis long before the ball arrived — with a helmet-to-helmet hit, no less. Everyone at the Superdome knew it was a penalty. Everyone, that is, except two officials who were staring right at it.

Their flags stayed tucked in their pockets, forcing the Saints to settle for Wil Lutz's 31-yard field goal that made it 23-20 with 1:41 left in regulation.

"Came to the sideline, looked at the football gods and was like, 'Thank you,'" Robey-Coleman said. "I got away with one tonight."

After the no-call, Goff had enough time to get the Rams in position for Zuerlein's tying field goal, a 48-yarder with 15 seconds remaining.

New Orleans won the coin toss and got the ball first in overtime. But, with Dante Fowler Jr. in his face and strik-

ing his arm, Brees fluttered up a pass that was picked off by John Johnson III, who was able to hang onto the interception while stumbling backward. Johnson hopped up and celebrated by doing the "Choppa Style" dance popularized by New Orleans rapper Choppa, whose namesake song had become a Saints' rallying cry.

The Rams weren't able to do much offensively, but it didn't matter. Zuerlein booted through the winning field goal from just inside midfield with plenty of room to spare.

"Whether we go through some adversity or we experience some success, we do not let that change us or affect us," Zuerlein said "We just keep on keeping on."

It was the first home playoff loss for the Saints with Brees and coach Sean Payton, who had been 6-0 at the Superdome since their pairing began in 2006.

Serena ousts Halep at Australian Open

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — As Serena Williams made her way out to the Australian Open's main court during pre-match introductions, the voice booming over the stadium's speakers implored spectators to welcome "the world's No. 1 player — from Romania, Simona Halep."

Oops.

Williams, wearing headphones, quickly pivoted and retreated back into the tunnel she'd just emerged from, making way for her fourth-round opponent Monday night. A couple of hours later, when Williams wrapped up her 6-1, 4-6, 6-4 victory over Halep in a contest filled with momentum swings and fantastic play by both, it was clear which woman really is No. 1, regardless of what the current rankings say.

"It was a really intense match, and it was some incredible points," said Williams, who improved to 9-1 against Halep and now meets 2016 U.S. Open runner-up Karolina Pliskova in the quarterfinals. "I love playing tennis and I love to play here and I love to be back out here."

The 37-year-old American sat out last year's Australian Open after giving birth to a daughter months earlier and dealing with health complications. Since returning to the tour, Williams has reached the

past two Grand Slam finals, losing both — and leaving her still one shy of equaling Margaret Court's record of 24 major singles titles.

Halep offered up the first real test Williams has faced at this year's Australian Open, where she is bidding for an eighth trophy, pushing her throughout a back-and-forth matchup that was a fascinating mix of power, court coverage and shotmaking.

It wasn't until Williams saved three break points in a monumental game to hold for 3-all in the third set that she gained control.

"I was unlucky a little bit," Halep said.

Williams then broke for a 4-3 lead and finally was on her way.

"In order for me to stay out there, I had to play a little like I knew I could," said Williams, who is seeded 16th on account of all the time she took away from tennis while becoming a mother. "I'm such a fighter. I just never give up. It's definitely something that's innate. I just work so hard for every point."

She also makes abundantly clear just how much every point means to her.

Against Halep — who beat Serena's older sister, Venus, in the third round — Williams frequently pumped her fists or yelled "Come on!" after key exchanges. When Halep hit one shot that caught the net tape

and barely trickled over for a winner, Williams looked pained and complained, "I mean, it's not fair."

Pliskova advanced earlier Monday with a 6-3, 6-1 victory over two-time major champion Garbine Muguruza.

The other quarterfinal on that side of the women's bracket features No. 4 Naomi Osaka against No. 6 Elina Svitolina. Osaka, who beat Serena Williams in last year's U.S. Open final, edged No. 13 Anastasija Sevastova 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the fourth round, while Svitolina got past 2017 U.S. Open finalist Madison Keys 6-2, 1-6, 6-1.

In men's matches, 2016 Wimbledon runner-up Milos Raonic knocked off No. 4-seeded Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-1, 7-6 (5), and next takes on No. 28 Lucas Pouille, a 6-7 (4), 6-4, 7-5, 7-6 (2) winner over No. 11 Borna Coric. No. 23 Pablo Carreno Busta left the court yelling at the chair umpire after a disagreement in the concluding tiebreaker of his 6-7 (8), 4-6, 7-6 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (8) loss to No. 8-seeded Kei Nishikori in a 5-hour, 5-minute marathon that was the longest match of the tournament. Nishikori's quarterfinal foe will be No. 1-seeded and six-time champion Novak Djokovic, who overcame a couple of tumbles to the court and a series of energy-sapping baseline exchanges — one point lasted 42 strokes! — to beat No. 15 Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 6-7

(5), 6-2, 6-3.

After topping Medvedev in a 3-hour, 15-minute struggle to get back to the quarterfinals for the first time in three years, Djokovic joked during an on-court interview: "Since I guess my next opponent is watching, I'm feeling fantastic. I've never felt fresher in my life."

Williams and Halep traded jittery breaks of serve in the opening two games, as each double-faulted and flubbed shots. But Williams settled down, compiling a 10-3 advantage in winners to grab the opening set.

"I felt," Halep said afterward, "like I had been hit by the train."

Halep then fell behind by a break in the second, before suddenly seeming to awaken and display her own brand of baseline talent that carried her to the Australian Open final and French Open championship in 2018.

Halep made only 12 unforced errors in the entire match, and that clean play got her back into things, especially as Williams' miscue count rose to a final tally of 31.

"She's back to being Serena on both the physical and emotional side. So I think her level is good," said Williams' coach, Patrick Mouratoglou. "I think she needed a big fight, and it happened today, and I think it's a great thing — especially when it ends like that."

Golf roundup

Long wins Desert Classic for first PGA victory

Associated Press

LA QUINTA, Calif. — Adam Long made a 14-foot birdie putt on the final hole Sunday to win the Desert Classic for his first PGA Tour title.

Making his sixth career start on the tour, Long closed with a 7-under 65 on the Stadium Course at PGA West to beat playing partners Phil Mickelson and

Adam Hadwin by a stroke.

Mickelson, the leader after each of the first three rounds, fought putting problems in a 69. His 40-foot birdie try on 18 curled left at the end.

Long set up the winning putt with a 6-iron shot from 175 yards with the ball below his feet in dormant grass on a mound to the right of the fairway. The 31-

year-old former Duke player earned his PGA Tour card with a 13th-place finish last year on the Web.com Tour's regular-season money list.

Hadwin shot 67, losing a three-stroke lead on the back nine.

LPGA: Eun-Hee Ji of South Korea outlasted the cold and wind to close with a 1-under 70

and win the Diamond Resorts Tournament of Champions by two shots in the season opener.

Ji shared the 54-hole lead with Lydia Ko, who fell apart on the back nine at Tranquilo Golf Club at Four Seasons in Lake Buena Vista, Fla. Ji finished at 14-under 270 to win by two over Mirim Lee, who made only one bogey in her round of 68. Nelly Korda (71) finished third.

NHL roundup

Toews, Blackhawks extend Capitals' season-worst skid

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Jonathan Toews loves playing alongside Patrick Kane, and the feeling is mutual.

With the Chicago Blackhawks struggling once again, coach Jeremy Colliton tried an old favorite.

Toews had three goals and two assists, Kane added two goals and three assists, and the Blackhawks handed the Washington Capitals their season-high fifth consecutive loss with an 8-5 victory on Sunday.

While Chicago's power play has been humming along quite nicely, the last-place Blackhawks have been struggling with their even-strength attack. Colliton mixed up his lines in response, putting Toews together with Kane — a common answer for predecessor Joel Quenneville during his 10-plus seasons in charge.

It worked.

"I know what he likes and how he likes to play and vice versa," Toews said. "I think we can

complement each other well. Obviously Kane's been playing with a ton of confidence, so for me it was just go out there and make his life easier and get him the puck and get to open areas."

Collin Delia made 34 saves, including impressive stops on John Carlson and Tom Wilson in the second.

Islanders 3, Ducks 0: Cal Clutterbuck scored twice in the first period and Robin Lehner made 19 saves as host New York downed Anaheim for its fifth straight win.

Canucks 3, Red Wings 2: Elias Pettersson had a goal and an assist in his return from a knee injury, and host Vancouver beat Detroit.

Coyotes 4, Maple Leafs 2: Vinnie Hinostroza scored in the third period and visiting Arizona beat slumping Toronto.

Hurricanes 7, Oilers 4: Nino Niederreiter and Lucas Wallmark each scored twice to lead visiting Carolina past Edmonton.

NBA roundup

Rose lifts T-wolves past Suns

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Derrick Rose and the Minnesota Timberwolves needed this one.

With 30 seconds left, Rose missed the first of two free throws and was kicking himself for failing to give his team the lead.

"I kept saying, 'You're going to get another shot,'" Taj Gibson said he told his long-time teammate. Twenty-nine seconds later, Rose proved Gibson prophetic.

Rose hit an 18-footer with 0.9 seconds left to give the Wolves a 116-114 victory over the Phoenix Suns on Sunday night. He carried his team by scoring 29 of his 31 points in the second half to help Minnesota overcome an 11-point deficit.

Gibson dunked to pull Minnesota within one with less than a minute to play. Karl-Anthony Towns intercepted a bad pass from Booker, and Rose hit the second of two foul shots to tie it at 114 with 30.5 remaining.

After giving Rose his pep talk, Gibson grabbed the loose ball after Devin Booker lost it on Phoenix's next possession. With the shot clock off and the crowd on its feet, Rose calmly dribbled down the clock against Mikal Bridges before pulling up and hitting the final shot.

"I missed a lot. It was all up to my teammates and the coaches for giving me that confidence, putting the ball in my hands and just believing in me," Rose said.

Clippers 103, Spurs 95: Tobias Harris had 27 points, nine rebounds and nine assists and visiting Los Angeles beat San Antonio to snap a five-game losing streak.

Pacers 120, Hornets 95: Victor Oladipo scored 21 points and Darren Collison added 19 points and nine assists, leading host Indiana past Charlotte.

Top 25 roundup

No. 11 Seminoles drop third straight

Associated Press

BOSTON — With just over a minute left and No. 11 Florida State rapidly closing the gap, an unlikely contributor popped onto the court to help Boston College hold on for a victory.

Running back AJ Dillon, the Atlantic Coast Conference's preseason football player of the year, got out of his courtside seat and wiped down the floor while the teams lined up for a free throw, drawing a chuckle and a cheer from the crowd.

"We needed all hands on deck," coach Jim Christian said after the Eagles upset the Seminoles 87-82, the third time in two seasons BC has beaten a ranked team in Chestnut Hill. "Could have used him in the post."

Ky Bowman scored 37 points and Jordan Chatman gave BC the lead for good by hitting

three straight three-pointers during a 21-4 run to start the second half that sent the Seminoles (13-5, 1-4 ACC) to their third straight loss.

BC (10-7, 1-4) led by nine with 87 seconds left before a pair of turnovers against the full-court press allowed FSU to make it a four-point game.

But freshman Wynston Tabbs made a three-pointer with 24 seconds remaining to turn back the rally and snap the Eagles' five-game losing streak. The Eagles also got some help from Nik Popovic, who at 6-foot-11 was able to dribble through the press in the second half and made five of his six free-throw attempts to ice it.

No. 15 Marquette 79, Providence 68: At Milwaukee, Sam Hauser scored 25 points, Markus Howard added 24 points and nine rebounds and

the Golden Eagles rallied past the Friars.

After honoring former star Dwyane Wade with a celebration that included a halftime tribute, Marquette (16-3, 5-1 Big East) surged and improved to 13-0 at home.

Nate Watson tied his career high with 21 points for Providence (11-7, 1-4).

No. 23 Iowa 95, Illinois 71: Freshman Joe Wieskamp matched a career high with 24 points and the Hawkeyes routed the visiting Illini for their fifth straight victory.

Isaiah Moss scored a season-high 21 points and Luka Garza added 20 for the Hawkeyes (16-3, 5-3 Big Ten). They shot 68 percent, hit 12 of their first 14 three-point attempts and 15 overall.

Ayo Dosunmu scored 15 points for Illinois (5-13, 1-6).