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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Iran's strike exposes Pentagon challenges

The Washington Post

For more than an hour, the missiles knifed in with a whoosh, explosions bursting in the night sky. It wasn't clear when they'd stop, or what they'd hit.

U.S., coalition and Iraqi troops hunkered down for the Iranian attack in Iraq on Tuesday night had prepared over several days for such an onslaught following the U.S. drone strike in Baghdad that killed Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian general with involvement in the deaths of hundreds of U.S. troops, according to U.S. officials.

But the attack highlighted an ongoing challenge for the Pentagon: For all its might, the U.S. military had little ability to stop such a missile attack once it was underway.

The challenges include the sheer volume of Iran's missile arsenal, believed to number more than 2,000, along with the Pentagon's scarce number of missile-defense options. Iran launched 16 missiles, with 11 hitting al Asad Air Base west of Baghdad, one landing at a facility in Irbil in northern Iraq and four malfunctioning, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said.

One senior U.S. military official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the issue's ongoing sensitivity, said that a ballistic missile is "obviously a significant threat for anybody." In the face of one, the official said, "You become a small target, if you will. You stay away from openings, windows, that kind of thing. It's what you would do in a tornado-like scenario."

The best missile-defense weapons that may have been able to help — Patriot missiles and a newer system known as Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD — were not in position in the two locations in Iraq that Iran attacked. The Army has 15 Patriot units, many of them committed to protecting U.S. interests elsewhere in the world. Four are permanently deployed to Europe and Asia, to guard against possible aggression from Russia and North Korea.

With such a limited number of systems in the U.S. arsenal, the Pentagon assessed last fall that the best place to position additional missile-defense weapons in the Middle East was in Saudi Arabia, which has faced regular attacks from Iranian-backed forces in Yemen, two senior defense officials said.

Adjustments will be made now, one of

those senior officials said, though he declined to say how. U.S. officials believed for months that it was unlikely Iran would launch missiles at Americans in Iraq, considering the diplomatic relations between Iraq and Iran. That was before U.S. forces killed Soleimani, however.

The major challenge to protecting bases like al Asad is the scarcity of missile-defense weapons, and significant number of other bases that the United States must protect, said Becca Wasser, a policy analyst at the Rand Corp. who studies war gaming and defense in the Middle East. Other bases that need protection include Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, Al Dhafra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates and Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar — some of which have fighter jets and other expensive weapons on them. The Navy's fleet in the Middle East also has headquarters within range in Bahrain.

"Patriots are high-demand, scarce assets, and they are, furthermore, point defenses," he said. "And so their defended area is relatively modest. Patriots are very good at doing what they are designed to do, but they can't be everywhere at once."

Army to send unit to Pacific to aid efforts to counter China

Bloomberg

The U.S. Army will expand efforts to counter China by deploying a specialized task force to the Pacific capable of conducting information, electronic, cyberspace and missile operations against Beijing.

The unit, which Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy detailed at an event in Washington on Friday, also would be equipped to hit land- and sea-based targets with long-range precision weapons such as hypersonic missiles, possibly clearing the way for Navy vessels in the event of conflict.

The Army task force would help neutralize some capabilities China and Russia already possess that are intended to

keep U.S. carrier groups away from the Asian mainland, McCarthy said in an interview. It's not clear how quickly the unit, which likely would be based on islands east of Taiwan and the Philippines, can be deployed.

The move is designed to "neutralize all the investments China and Russia have made," McCarthy said. It would be bolstered by a new agreement with the National Reconnaissance Office that develops and manages U.S. spy satellites, he said. Under that accord, Army tactical units will be better able to tap into information from existing and future low-Earth-orbit satellites, he said.

The pivot would help Defense Secretary Mark Esper

achieve a long-sought American goal of shifting more forces from Europe, the Middle East and Africa to the Pacific, better positioning the U.S. to take on "peer competitor" China and historic rival Russia. The extent to which the current tensions with Iran upset that plan remains to be determined but the Army is pressing ahead.

Under McCarthy's vision, the move would allow the Army to create a new paradigm in the Pacific where ground forces would "punch a hole" in enemy defenses for air and naval forces.

Now, the ground-based unit in those island chains can create the support "for air and sea," McCarthy said.

China's military doctrine

calls for a so-called "anti-access" strategy, backed by long-range anti-ship missiles and space-based surveillance capabilities, intended to keep U.S. aircraft carrier strike groups well beyond the so-called first and second island chains. The first island chain extends from the Kuril islands down to Borneo, while the second island chain generally extends from just east of Japan to Guam and down toward New Guinea.

The pivot includes greater Army participation in regional war games such as the "Defender Pacific" series and deploying a "Security Force Assistance Brigade" next year for the Indo-Pacific theater similar to ones set up and deployed to Afghanistan, he said.

Iranians protest over downed airplane

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iranian demonstrators defied a heavy police presence Sunday night to protest their country's days of denials that it shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane carrying 176 people, the latest unrest to roil the capital amid soaring tensions with the United States.

Videos posted online showed protesters shouting anti-government slogans and moving through subway stations and sidewalks, many near Azadi, or Freedom, Square after an earlier call for people to demonstrate there. Other videos suggested similar protests were taking place in other Iranian cities.

Meanwhile, in an emotional speech before parliament, the head of the Revolutionary Guard apologized for the shootdown and insisted it was a tragic mistake.

"I swear to almighty God that I wished I was on that plane and had crashed with them and burned but had not witnessed this tragic incident," said Gen. Hossein Salami. "I have never been this embarrassed in my entire life. Never."

Riot police in black uniforms and helmets earlier massed in Vali-e Asr Square, at Tehran University and other landmarks.

"After successive national traumas in a short time period, people should be allowed

to safely grieve and demand accountability," said Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Iranians shouldn't have to risk their lives to exercise their constitutional right to peaceful assembly."

Iranians have expressed anger over the downing of the plane and the misleading explanations from senior officials in the wake of the tragedy. They are also mourning the dead, which included many young people who were studying abroad.

Earlier Sunday, hundreds of students gathered at Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University to mourn the victims and protest

against authorities for concealing the cause of the crash, the semiofficial ISNA news agency reported.

President Donald Trump addressed the country's leaders in a tweet, saying "DO NOT KILL YOUR PROTESTERS."

"The World is watching. More importantly, the USA is watching," he tweeted.

A candlelight ceremony late Saturday in Tehran turned into a protest, with hundreds of people chanting against the country's leaders — including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — and police dispersing them with tear gas. Protests were also held in the city of Isfahan and elsewhere.

First all-female team takes win in bomb-building event

BY NORMAN LLAMAS
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — They Could Do It!

For the first time since Aviano began hosting its quarterly bomb-building competition, an all-female team entered — and won. The team, called the Bouncing Bettys, completed the Rapid Aircraft Generation and Employment competition last week.

All of the Bouncing Bettys dressed as Rosie the Riveter, the World War II icon whose image appeared on posters proclaiming, "We Can Do It!" The posters were used to recruit women to work in factories and shipyards to produce munitions and war supplies.

The RAGE competition included six evaluated events: a written test, stockpile practices, trailer configuration and re-configuration, air cargo palletization and a weapons-build, said U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa in a Facebook post congratulating

the team on their win.

The competition is a relatively new event, first held in October.

The Bouncing Bettys were Staff Sgt. Ana L. Merkel, a munitions inspector; Staff Sgt. Catharyn M. Clyde, a munitions control supervisor; Staff Sgt. Nicole D. Jarvis, an NCOIC of conventional munitions support; Airman 1st Class Ashlyn B. Martin, a stockpile management technician; Airman Erin N. Brumm, a stockpile management technician, all from the 31st Munitions Squadron; and Senior Airman Audrey M. Naputi, a munitions inspector from the 731st Munitions Squadron. All are based at Aviano. Following their win, the Bouncing Bettys' names will be etched on plaques, which will be added to the 31st Munitions Squadron's heritage.

"No better way to kick off 2020," said Bouncing Bettys member Jarvis in a Facebook post sharing photos of the event.

US to expel some Saudi trainees after FBI probe

The Washington Post

At least a dozen Saudi military trainees in the United States could be sent back to their home country after an FBI investigation found connections to extremist rhetoric, possession of child pornography, and a failure by a small number of people to report alarming behavior by the gunman who killed three people last month at a Pensacola, Fla., military base, according to people familiar with the matter.

Federal law enforcement and military officials are preparing to announce developments in the case. The FBI has been treating the shooting as a terrorist incident, particularly after discovering an anti-American screed posted by the gunman just before the December shooting, according to the people familiar with the matter. They requested anonymity because they weren't authorized to publicly discuss decisions by government officials.

Several of the Saudis were found to possess child pornography, while others were found to have been part of a social media conversation that included alarming support for extremism, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Lt. Col. Robert Carver, a Department of Defense spokesman, said, "In the wake of the Pensacola tragedy, the Department of Defense restricted to classroom training programs foreign military students from Saudi Arabia while we conducted a review and enhancement of our foreign student vetting procedures. That training pause is still in place while we implement new screening and security measures."

The Saudi government has been cooperative in the FBI investigation, even going so far as to help American investigators link particular social media accounts to individuals, according to a U.S. official.

Deadly storms sweep South, Midwest

Associated Press

Thousands remained without electrical power Sunday morning after weekend storms ravaged parts of the Southeast and Midwest, causing 11 deaths, overturning cars, uprooting trees and reducing buildings to rubble.

The National Weather Service said it was a tornado packing winds of at least 134 mph that hit Alabama's Pickens County on Saturday, killing three.

Storm-related fatalities were also reported in Texas due to icy weather and in Louisiana, where winds were so strong that a trailer home was lifted off its foundation and carried several hundred feet. A man drowned in Oklahoma and the

storms even touched the Midwest with at least one death on an icy highway in Iowa.

Two first responders were killed and another was critically injured in Lubbock, Texas, on Saturday morning after they were hit by a vehicle while working the scene of a traffic accident in icy conditions, officials said.

Police Officer Nicholas Reyna, 27, who had been with the department for one year, died at the scene. Firefighter Lt. David Hill, 39, was taken to a local hospital where he later died. Firefighter Matthew Dawson, 30, was hospitalized in critical condition.

Another person died in Texas on Friday night when a car flipped into a creek in Dal-

las as severe thunderstorms passed through. Lightning from Friday's stormy weather was suspected of causing fires that burned two houses but caused no injuries in the North Texas cities of Burleson and Mansfield.

A man drowned near Kiowa, Okla., after he was swept away in floodwaters, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol said Saturday. Randall Hyatt, 58, of Wardville was overwhelmed by rushing water while getting out of his stalled truck.

The Iowa State Patrol said roads were caked with ice early Saturday when a semitrailer on Interstate 80 overturned, killing a passenger in the truck east of Iowa City.

In Alabama, three people

were confirmed killed near Carrollton in Pickens County, the National Weather Service in Birmingham tweeted. The Alabama Emergency Management Agency said the deaths were caused by an "embedded tornado within a long line of intense thunderstorms."

Earlier Saturday, in northwestern Louisiana, firefighters found the bodies of Jerry W. Franks, 79, and Mary Sue Franks, 65, near their demolished trailer in Benton, the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office said via Facebook.

Also in Louisiana, Raymond Holden, 75, was killed in his bed when a tree fell on his home in Oil City, crushing him, according to the Caddo Parish Coroner's Office.

Residents restless as Puerto Rico shakes

Miami Herald

GUANICA, Puerto Rico — Elicier Lugo was evacuating his shattered home on Saturday when he was jolted by a magnitude 5.9 aftershock.

Then he heard a roar from the mountain behind him.

A boulder the size of a jet ski tumbled down the cliff, bounced over a house, broke through a concrete fence and came to rest by the bumper of his neighbor's car. Her daughter was in the back seat.

Southern Puerto Rico has been gripped by a series of

tremors that began Dec. 28 and peaked on Tuesday with a magnitude 6.4 earthquake. Since then, hundreds of aftershocks have followed.

Guanica — a small coastal town on a pleasant inlet — has taken the brunt of the damage. More than 150 buildings have either been destroyed or affected, including city hall and the local school. Saturday's aftershock — the most powerful yet since Tuesday's "mainshock" — brought fresh pain. One of the principle bridges into town was closed after cracks appeared in its surface.

On Saturday, Gov. Wanda Vazquez reassured jittery islanders that the aftershocks were to be expected and would likely continue for days or weeks.

The U.S. Geological Survey also said that the most likely scenario is for aftershocks to continue at diminishing rates and strength for the next 30 days. However, it said there's a 20% chance of a "doublet" — an earthquake of equal intensity to Tuesday's 6.4 — occurring over the next month. In addition, it assigned a 3% chance that a larger quake might hit during

that time period.

Despite the continued rumbling, recovery efforts are underway. On Saturday, teams of workers were replacing transformers and powerlines as structural engineers scoured Guanica trying to assess the damage.

Puerto Rico's Electric Power Authority said 96% of its 1.4 million customers now have electricity, although Guanica and others on the center-southern coast were still largely powerless.

Permit applications rise in wake of Hanukkah attack

Associated Press

MONSEY, N.Y. — The number of residents seeking to own handguns has risen sharply in a New York community shaken last month by a machete attack that injured five men during a Hanukkah celebration.

The Journal News reports 73 pistol permit applications have

been filed with the Rockland County Clerk's Office since the Dec. 28 attack at a rabbi's home in Monsey, a hamlet in the town of Ramapo northwest of New York City.

That compares to 51 applications the office received during the eight weeks prior to the stabbing, County Clerk Paul Piperato told the newspaper.

Sixty-eight of the new applications came from Ramapo residents, including 31 from Monsey.

"It's definitely because of this incident," Piperato told the newspaper, referring to the attack. "In some way, shape or form, they want to defend themselves."

Chief William Barbera of the

Rockland County Sheriff's Department says an application is the first step in a months-long process. Applicants are required to be fingerprinted and undergo a background check and firearms training before the paperwork is submitted to a licensing officer.

Australia takes offense in fire fight

Associated Press

BODALLA, Australia — Crews battling Australia's wildfires said Sunday that they have been able to turn from defense to offense for the first time in weeks thanks to a break in the weather.

Dale McLean, who is helping manage the response to a fire near the town of Bodalla in New South Wales state, was part of a team that was bulldozing down small trees and burning scrub ahead of the fire's projected path to try to stop it from reaching a major highway by starving it of fuel.

"This fire took a major run about seven or eight days ago,

and with the weather changing now, the weather settling down, the fire has settled down," he said. "The fire behavior has changed. So we're able to get in front of the fire now, get on the offensive."

Other workers echoed McLean's comments, saying cooler temperatures and mild winds have finally offered them a chance to make progress. The weather is expected to remain benign for the next week, although any deterioration in conditions after that could see the wildfires flare up again.

The progress made by the crews came after a firefighter was killed by a falling tree. Bill Slade — one of the few profes-

sionals among mainly volunteer brigades battling blazes across southeast Australia — died on Saturday near Omeo in eastern Victoria state, Forest Fire Management Victoria Executive Director Chris Hardman said.

The tragedy brings the death toll to at least 27 in a crisis that has destroyed more than 2,000 homes and scorched an area larger than the U.S. state of Indiana since September. Four of the casualties have been firefighters.

The crisis has brought accusations that Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative government needs to take more action to counter climate

change, which experts say has worsened the blazes. Thousands of protesters rallied Friday in Sydney and Melbourne, calling for Morrison to be fired and for Australia to take tougher action on global warming.

The prime minister said Sunday that his government was building resilience to the fire danger posed by climate change.

He said the government was developing a national disaster risk reduction framework within the Department of Home Affairs that will deal with wildfires, cyclones, floods and drought.

Small volcano erupts near Manila as thousands flee

Associated Press

TAGAYTAY, Philippines — A small volcano south of the Philippine capital that draws many tourists for its picturesque setting in a lake erupted with a massive plume of ash and steam Sunday, prompting thousands of people to flee and officials to shut Manila's international airport.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said Taal Volcano in Batangas province south of Manila blasted steam, ash and pebbles up to 6 to 9 miles into the sky in a dramatic escalation of its growing restiveness, which began last year.

The volcanology institute raised the danger level around Taal three notches on Sunday to level 4, indicating "a hazardous eruption may happen within hours or days," said Renato Solidum, who heads the volcanology institute. Level 5, the highest, means a hazardous eruption is underway and could affect a larger area.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage, but authorities scrambled to evacuate more than 6,000 villagers

from an island in the middle of a lake, where the volcano lies, and tens of thousands more from nearby coastal towns, officials said.

"We have asked people in high-risk areas, including the volcano island, to evacuate now ahead of a possible hazardous eruption," Solidum said.

International and domestic flights were suspended Sunday night at Manila's international airport "due to volcanic ash in the vicinity of the airport" and nearby air routes, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said.

Heavy to light ashfall was reported several miles from the volcano, and officials advised residents to stay indoors and don masks and goggles for safety. Motorists were hampered by poor visibility, which was worsened by rainy weather.

Authorities recorded a swarm of earthquakes, some of them felt with rumbling sounds, and a slight inflation of portions of the 1,020-foot volcano ahead of Sunday's steam-driven explosion, officials said.

Oman's longest-ruling monarch remembered as peacekeeper

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Oman's Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Mideast's longest-ruling monarch who seized power in a 1970 palace coup and pulled his Arabian sultanate into modernity while carefully balancing diplomatic ties between adversaries Iran and the U.S., has died. He was 79.

The British-educated, reclusive sultan reformed a nation that was home to only three schools and harsh laws banning electricity, radios, eyeglasses and even umbrellas when he took the throne.

Under his reign, Oman became known as a welcoming tourist destination and a key Mideast interlocutor, helping the U.S. free captives in Iran and Yemen and even hosting visits by Israeli officials while pushing back on their occupation of land Palestinians want for a future state.

"We do not have any conflicts and we do not put fuel on the fire when our opinion does not agree with someone," Sultan Qaboos told a Kuwaiti newspaper in a rare interview in 2008.

Oman's state-run news agency announced his death early Sat-

urday, but offered no cause. The royal court declared three days of mourning. Following Islamic tradition, the sultan was buried before nightfall.

The sultan's death had raised the risk of unrest in this country on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. The unmarried Sultan Qaboos had no children and did not publicly name an heir, a tradition among the ruling Al Said dynasty whose history is replete with bloody takeovers. But within hours, Oman state television announced Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, who had served as the sultanate's culture minister, as the new sultan.

The sultan had been believed to be ill for some time, though authorities never disclosed what malady he faced.

The sultan's greatest diplomatic achievement came as Oman hosted secret talks between Iranian and U.S. diplomats that led to the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. The agreement, which limited Iran's atomic program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, has come unraveled since President Donald Trump withdrew from it in May 2018.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police remove 62 animals from home

WY CASPER — Casper police officials removed 62 animals that were subjected to what authorities described as unsanitary and neglectful conditions from a Natrona County home.

Animal protection officers worked for more than three hours to remove 46 dogs, 15 rabbits and a cat, the Casper Star-Tribune reported.

The animals were being evaluated by a veterinarian and recovering in a shelter.

Police officials said they previously tried to help the home owner create a plan to take better care of the animals after they responded to a complaint in December.

FBI is trying to catch a 'bad wig bandit'

NC CHARLOTTE — The FBI is asking the public's help in catching a so-called "bad wig bandit" who's been robbing banks in North Carolina.

The FBI said in a statement that the suspect wore a different wig during each heist in the Charlotte area.

One wig was blonde. Another was black. The third was red.

The FBI said he robbed a BB&T in Huntersville on Dec. 13. He then robbed two banks on Jan. 7. The first was a New Horizon Bank in Belmont. The second was a Wells Fargo in Gastonia.

Junior, state's official Easter Bunny, dies

VA VIRGINIA BEACH — A 25-pound rabbit that served as Virginia's official Easter Bunny as well as a service animal for a U.S. Army

veteran has died.

The Virginian-Pilot reported the news last week, although the animal died in November after an illness.

Lord Roland Watson Beldon Maxwell VIII was known as Junior. The rabbit was 3½ feet long and belonged to Angela "Max" Maxwell of Virginia Beach.

The 56-year-old's face was grazed by a sniper bullet while serving in Desert Storm. She rarely ventured out in public without Junior.

Man breaks into Taco Bell, eats, takes nap

GA LAWRENCEVILLE — Taco Bell wasn't open on Christmas Day but a burglar in Georgia decided he wanted a festive feast anyway — and to take a nap while he was at it.

Just after midnight Dec. 25, a man approached a Taco Bell and entered through the drive-thru window.

Surveillance video showed him using the fryers to make himself a meal.

After eating, he proceeded to take a nap on the restaurant floor. Prior to leaving about three hours later, the suspect stole a laptop and tablet, investigators said.

Police: Couple baited thieves, beat them

CA VISALIA — A central California couple was arrested after investigators said they lured thieves to their home with the intention of assaulting them, according to a news report.

Corey Curnutt and Savannah Grillot left an unattended bicycle outside their residence and when it was taken they allegedly chased the thieves and beat them with an aluminum

bat, KFSN-TV reported. It wasn't immediately known if they have attorneys.

Police began investigating Curnutt and Grillot after clips of the bait bike videos began appearing on YouTube last July, said Visalia Police Lt. Ron Epp.

Rules set for island where pelicans nest

LA NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana is setting rules for a barrier island that's being restored to greatly increase the number of pelicans and other seabirds that can nest there.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission made Queen Bess Island a wildlife refuge in November.

It's taking comments through March 2 on the rules, which include no hunting, nighttime activities or vehicles ever and no public access during nesting season, from February through September.

During that season, fishing would be forbidden between the island and breakwaters built to protect it.

Rehabbed turtle released into sea

FL WILBUR-BY-THE-SEA — A sea turtle whose left flipper was amputated due to an infection was released back into the Atlantic Ocean in Florida.

The green turtle named Endor had spent months rehabilitating and living in the Florida Aquarium in Tampa before being released on Florida's East coast.

The turtle was taken to Tampa on April 1 with six other turtles who had endured cold-stunning, which is similar to hypothermia and causes low blood circulation, pneumo-

nia, decreased heart rate and exhaustion.

Endor grew from 3.24 pounds to 13.67 pounds during his rehabilitation program.

In case Endor washes up on shore or gets injured, aquarium biologists tagged Endor so others can have access to his medical condition and history.

Skulls, jaw bones found in storage boxes

NV LAS VEGAS — Two human skulls and two human jaw bones were discovered in archival storage boxes by a volunteer, prompting an investigation, Clark County Museum officials said.

The 50-year-old museum grew from a collection of items from the Las Vegas Valley's first female mortician Anna Roberts Parks, The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

This was the first time human remains were found in Parks' collection, museum registrar Cynthia Sanford said.

The bones were taken to the Clark County coroner's office for investigation, officials said.

Hacked road sign says: 'Send Nudes'

KY PINE KNOT — Drivers traveling along a Kentucky highway didn't have to check their direct messages to receive the infamous sexting request: send nudes.

An electronic road sign that was hacked asked drivers on Highway 92 in Pine Knot to "send nudes," news outlets reported.

Officials with the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet said someone had hacked through the password-protected system. The sign belonged to a contractor doing construction work.

From wire reports

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Henry, Titans upset Ravens

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — With his bright red shoes and relentless running, Derrick Henry grabbed the spotlight and wouldn't let go.

When he was done leading Tennessee into the AFC championship game Saturday night, he did a lengthy victory lap around the Baltimore Ravens' home, slapping hands and taking selfies with Titans fans.

It has been quite a two-week ride.

"It's not just me," Henry said after rushing for 195 yards and throwing a 3-yard touchdown pass in a 28-12 upset of the NFL's top team Saturday night. "It's a team effort. We're all playing collectively as an offense, as a whole. We're just locked in. We believe in each other. We communicate. It's working out there."

The Titans fear no one, and why should they with Henry rushing — and even throwing — the ball, and a big-play defense making clutch stops and turnovers?

One week after dominating defending Super Bowl champion New England, the Titans (11-7) eliminated Baltimore (14-3). The Ravens had won their last 12 games, with quarterback Lamar Jackson setting records and looking unstoppable.

On Saturday night, it was Henry who was unstoppable, despite Baltimore stacking eight men up front on almost two-thirds of his runs. At

times, Henry used power to create space, at others the holes the line provided were huge.

"Watch us work," said Henry, the NFL's leading rusher this season. "We don't do too much talking. We just go work and believe in each other. That's our mentality. We're going to come in here and work. ... Focus on finishing."

Tennessee's defense had two interceptions of All-Pro QB Jackson, who also lost a fumble, and the Titans twice stopped Baltimore on fourth-and-1.

Henry's jump-pass to Corey Davis displayed yet another of his skills. He has completed three throws in four attempts in his career.

"I put it perfect, man," he said with a smile. "I haven't done that pass since high school. I feel like I still got it."

But it's the way he plows over and through opponents that makes Henry — and the Titans — dangerous. Next week, they will go after their second Super Bowl trip and first since the 1999 season, either at Kansas City or Houston. The last sixth seed to get to the big game was Green Bay in the 2010 season; the Packers won it all.

Tennessee scored all of its points off takeaways or fourth-down stops.

Ryan Tannehill's throws to Jonnu Smith and Kalif Raymond, who missed the last two games in concussion protocol, gave Tennessee a 14-point edge.

Ex-Steelers coach Cowher elected to Hall of Fame

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former Pittsburgh Steelers coach Bill Cowher was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in a surprise announcement Saturday night before the Tennessee Titans-Baltimore Ravens AFC divisional round playoff game.

Hall President and CEO David Baker delivered the news live in studio to Cowher, an analyst for CBS, during the network's "The NFL Today" pregame show broadcast.

"This isn't right that this is happening right now, but ..." a grinning Cowher told Baker, who then officially welcomed the former coach into this year's Hall of Fame class.

Cowher, now 62, was the coach of the Steelers for 15 seasons from 1992 to 2006, and led them to 10 playoff appearances, including two Super Bowls and winning one — beating Seattle in 2006. His Pittsburgh teams won nine division titles.

Cowher had an overall career record of 161-99-1 with a .619 winning percentage.

A special panel met at the Hall in Canton, Ohio, on Wednesday to elect the centennial slate for this year's class of inductees marking the first time any members were elected during a selection meeting held at the Hall in Canton.

The centennial slate includes 10 "seniors" (players who last played more than 25 seasons ago), three "contributors" (an individual other than a player or coach) and two "coaches" (who last coached more than five seasons ago) and were voted on from a list of 38 finalists. The remainder of the 15-person centennial slate will be revealed live on "Good Morning Football" on Wednesday.

The Hall's overall class will consist of 20 members, including an additional five who will be added the day before the Super Bowl, when the modern-era player finalists are voted on by the Pro Football Hall of Fame selection committee.

Niners dominate Vikings

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Richard Sherman anticipated the route for an interception and then watched the San Francisco 49ers run eight straight times for the touchdown that put them in control of their first playoff game in six years.

The dominant defense and powerful running game that carried the Niners to an 8-0 start this season delivered a 27-10 victory over the Minnesota Vikings in the divisional round Saturday.

"People keep disrespecting us. At the end of the day, all you can do is go out and execute," Sherman said. "It felt good. That's what we look like when we're totally healthy."

The return of injured defensive starters Dee Ford, Kwon Alexander and Jaquiski Tartt had the Niners (14-3) playing as

they did in the first half of the season as they set a franchise playoff record by allowing only 147 yards.

Jimmy Garoppolo threw a TD pass on his opening drive as a playoff starter and then mostly watched his defense and running game take over from there. The top-seeded 49ers turned a pair of second-half turnovers by Minnesota (11-7) into 10 points.

"They're pretty good right?" tight end George Kittle said of his defense. "It's such a blast just to watch them, how they work together. ..."

"If our defense keeps playing like that, all we have to do is not turn the ball over to win games."

Sherman set up Tevin Coleman's second short touchdown run of the game when he beat Adam Thielen to the spot to intercept Kirk Cous-

ins for his third career playoff interception.

Coleman had five of the eight carries on the 44-yard drive as part of a 105-yard rushing performance.

"Those guys did very well," Coleman said of his offensive line. "They moved the guys back so I had clear holes to run through. So, yeah, they did a real good job."

Marcus Sherels' fumbled punt later in the third quarter led to a field goal that made it 27-10 early in the fourth quarter.

San Francisco didn't allow Minnesota to gain a first down for more than 27 minutes of game action starting late in the second quarter.

The Niners will host the NFC championship game next week against the winner of Sunday's game between Seattle and Green Bay.

NBA roundup

Celtics top Pelicans, snap 3-game skid

Associated Press

BOSTON — Celtics coach Brad Stevens said giving his team a day off following its worst losing streak of the season felt like the right thing to do.

It certainly re-energized Jayson Tatum. The third-year forward made six three-pointers and scored a career-high 41 points as Boston cruised past the short-handed New Orleans Pelicans, 140-105 on Saturday night.

Tatum's first career 40-point performance helped the Celtics snap a season-high, three-game skid.

"Shots were going in. It felt good. I felt like we played with a purpose today on both ends, from the beginning of the game," Tatum said. "I felt like we did our job. I know we haven't been playing well lately. It felt good to start the game off right."

Lakers 125, Thunder 110: Kyle Kuzma scored a season-high 36 points and the Los Angeles Lakers rolled past the Oklahoma City Thunder 125-110 on Saturday night without stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

Rockets 139, Timberwolves 109: James Harden scored 32 points in three quarters to surpass 20,000 and Houston rolled past visiting Minnesota.

Mavericks 109, 76ers 91: Luka Dončić had 19 points and 12 assists, Dwight Powell scored 10 of his 19 points in a decisive third quarter in host Dallas' victory over Philadelphia.

Cavaliers 113, Nuggets 103: Kevin Love had 19 points and 15 rebounds to lead visiting Cleveland past Denver.

Collin Sexton finished with 25 points, and Tristan Thompson had 18 points and

13 rebounds for the Cavs in their second straight victory.

Bucks 122, Trail Blazers 101: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points and 17 rebounds, Khris Middleton scored 30 points and Milwaukee beat host Portland.

Damian Lillard led Portland with 26 points, CJ McCollum had 20 and Carmelo Anthony added 19 points and 11 rebounds. The Trail Blazers have lost eight of 10.

Bulls 108, Pistons 99: Zach LaVine scored 25 points and visiting Chicago held off Detroit to snap a six-game losing streak.

Already without injured Blake Griffin, the Pistons lost Andre Drummond when he was ejected early in the third quarter. Drummond threw the ball off the back of Daniel Gafford's head. The exchange also resulted in a technical foul on Gafford.

NHL roundup

Lightning roll to 10th straight win

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tampa Bay got offense from an unlikely source to keep its winning streak going.

Pat Maroon scored the game's only goal, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 23 saves and the Lightning tied a club record with their 10th straight win, 1-0 over the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday night.

The Lightning haven't lost since Dec. 21 at Washington, and have outscored opponents 43-17 during their streak. Tampa Bay has tallied 12 unanswered goals, two short of matching a team mark.

Devils 5, Capitals 1: Nico Hischier scored twice, Louis Domingue made 33 saves and the last-place New Jersey routed NHL-leading Washington, snapping the Devils' losing streak at three games.

Blake Coleman scored a short-handed goal, and Nikita Gusev added one moment after a power play ended for

the Devils. Miles Wood scored an empty-netter.

The Capitals lost back-to-back games in regulation for the second time this season and have dropped four of seven. Defensive-zone miscues continue to haunt the team, which largely hung All-Star goalie Braden Holtby out to dry as he allowed four goals on 21 shots.

Jakub Vrana's scored for Washington.

Bruins 3, Islanders 2 (OT): Patrice Bergeron scored a power-play goal 1:33 into overtime to lift Boston to a win at New York.

Jake DeBrusk and John Moore scored, and Tuukka Rask stopped 35 shots to help the Bruins win their third straight. Boston also improved to 7-1-5 in its last 13 games.

Mathew Barzal had a goal and an assist, and Scott Mayfield also scored for the Islanders. Semyon Varlamov had 30 saves.

Hurricanes 2, Kings 0: James Reimer made 41 saves

as host Carolina posted a shut-out for the second consecutive game.

Blues 5, Rangers 2: David Perron celebrated his selection to the NHL All-Star Game by scoring in his fourth straight contest, helping host St. Louis beat the Rangers.

Robert Bortuzzo, Vince Dunn, Zach Sanford and Jaden Schwartz also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions, who are 11-2-1 in their last 14.

Canadiens 2, Senators 1 (OT): Ilya Kovalchuk scored with 52 seconds left in overtime, helping Montreal snap an eight-game losing streak with a win at Ottawa. Coming into the game, neither team had won since Dec. 23.

Canucks 6, Sabres 3: Brock Boeser and Jake Virtanen scored 1:24 apart in the third period, and Vancouver won at Buffalo.

Boeser had two goals and Bo Horvat and J.T. Miller also scored for the Canucks, who had

dropped consecutive games by a combined 14-4. Loui Eriksson had an empty-netter, and Jacob Markstrom stopped 25 shots to go 7-1 in his past eight games.

Blackhawks 4, Ducks 2: Dominik Kubalik scored two goals, Jonathan Toews had a goal and an assist and host Chicago beat Anaheim.

Blue Jackets 3, Golden Knights 0: Elvis Merzlikins made 27 saves for his first career shutout and Columbus won at Las Vegas.

Sharks 2, Stars 1: Brent Burns had a goal and an assist, Patrick Marleau also scored, and host San Jose beat Dallas, spoiling the return of former star Joe Pavelski.

Jamie Benn scored for the Stars, who had a six-game winning streak halted.

Flames 4, Oilers 3: Elias Lindholm scored twice and host Calgary rallied to beat Edmonton.

Clemson rallies to first win at Chapel Hill

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Aamir Simms hit an overtime-forcing three-pointer with 3.5 seconds left in regulation and Clemson went on to erase decades of futility at North Carolina by beating the Tar Heels 79-76 on Saturday, earning their first win in 60 tries in Chapel Hill.

Simms finished with 20 points for the Tigers (8-7, 2-3 Atlantic Coast Conference), who trailed by 10 with a little more than two minutes left in regulation. But Clemson made a frantic comeback to force the extra period, then came up with enough key baskets to do what no other predecessor had done in school history: walk off

the court in Chapel Hill in celebration of a win.

Simms added a critical driving basket with 18.1 seconds left in OT, then the Tigers got a final stop when Garrison Brooks and then Brandon Robinson both missed tying three-pointers on the final possession.

When Robinson's missed at the horn, Clemson players ran to midcourt to celebrate, while John Newman III ran to wrap coach Brad Brownell in a huge hug on the sideline.

Meanwhile, Robinson laid on the court after his miss, capping a day that saw him go for a career-high 27 points but come up a shot short.

UNC (8-8, 1-4) came into this one 59-0 against Clemson all-time in Chapel Hill for the

longest home winning streak against one opponent in NCAA history. That included 28-0 in the Smith Center, UNC's campus arena that opened in January 1986. The win leaves coach Roy Williams tied with late mentor Dean Smith for fourth on the Division I men's career coaching wins list with 879 victories since the Tar Heels beat Yale on Dec. 30.

Big picture

Clemson: Beyond the long run of bad history here, the Tigers were trying to win consecutive games for the first time since starting 5-1. And they looked on their way to another frustrating loss in Chapel Hill when they trailed 68-58 with

2:08 left, only to complete an improbable turnaround and make history.

UNC: The Tar Heels were struggling with their worst record through 15 games under Williams. And they were battered entering this one, from top player Cole Anthony missing his seventh straight game following knee surgery to the pregame announcement that freshman point guard Jeremiah Francis wouldn't play due to left-knee soreness. Williams said Friday he doesn't say much about the streak with his team beyond noting it has to end at some point and the goal should be to "try to put it off another year." And now, that run is over.

Roundup

No. 14 Kentucky downs 'Bama for 1,000th SEC win

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Immanuel Quickley scored the game's final five points and finished with 19, and the No. 14 Kentucky Wildcats topped the Alabama Crimson Tide 76-67 for their 1,000th Southeastern Conference victory.

The Wildcats (12-3, 3-0) led by 15 early in the second half before a cold stretch allowed the Crimson Tide to climb within 63-60 with just over five minutes remaining. But Quickley stepped up down the stretch.

Kentucky beat Alabama for the 12th time in 13 meetings despite shooting just 32% after intermission. The Wildcats are 1,000-281 overall in SEC play.

Herbert Jones had 18 points for the Crimson Tide (8-7, 1-2), and John Petty Jr. finished with 16.

Kentucky made 9 of 15 three-point shots. That was one shy of the season-high 10 it made against Lamar.

No. 1 Gonzaga 87, Loyola Marymount 62: Filip Petrusev scored 16 points, Corey Kispert had 15 and the Bulldogs won on

the road against the Lions.

It was Gonzaga's 31st straight regular-season win in West Coast Conference play, tying them with the San Francisco squads led by Bill Russell and K.C. Jones for the second-longest streak in conference history behind Pepperdine's 32.

No. 2 Duke 90, Wake Forest 59: Tre Jones scored 23 points to lead the host Blue Devils to the runaway victory.

Cassius Stanley added 16 points for Duke (15-1, 5-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), which shot 53% from the field.

No. 4 Baylor 67, No. 3 Kansas 55: Jared Butler scored 22 points, MaCio Teague added 16 and the Bears got their first win at Allen Fieldhouse.

Freddie Gillespie added 13 points for Baylor (13-1, 3-0 Big 12), which snapped a whole slew of ignominious streaks with the victory in Lawrence. It beat a top-five team on the road for the first time in 22 attempts.

No. 5 Auburn 82, Georgia 60: Samir Doughty had 17 points, and the host Tigers shot 53% percent from the field in

the win.

Auburn (15-0, 3-0 Southeastern Conference) surged with a 40-13 run after falling behind early to the Bulldogs (10-5, 0-2), a stretch that extended into the second half.

No. 7 San Diego State 83, Boise State 65: KJ Feagin scored 16 of his season-high 23 points in the first half as the Aztecs played their best home game all season, opening with a 23-9 outburst against the Broncos.

No. 9 Oregon 78, Arizona State 69: Payton Pritchard scored 29 points and the host Ducks held off the Sun Devils.

Indiana 66, No. 11 Ohio State 54: Devonte Green scored 19 points, Rob Phinisee had 13 in his first start of the season, and the host Hoosiers handed the Buckeyes their fourth straight loss.

No. 13 Louisville 67, Notre Dame 64: Jordan Nwora scored 20 points, and the Cardinals won on the road.

No. 15 Dayton 88, Massachusetts 60: Obi Toppin scored 16 points before leav-

ing with an ankle injury early in the second half, and the host Flyers pulled away for the win.

No. 16 Villanova 80, Georgetown 66: The host Wildcats' Saddiq Bey hit eight three-pointers and scored a career-high 33 points.

No. 17 West Virginia 66, No. 22 Texas Tech 54: Miles McBride scored a season-high 22 points and Oscar Tshiebwe grabbed 17 rebounds, leading the host Mountaineers.

Syracuse 63, No. 18 Virginia 55 (OT): Buddy Boeheim scored nine of his 14 points in overtime and the Orange got the win on the road.

Wisconsin 58, No. 20 Penn State 49: Micah Potter scored 18 of his career-high 24 points in the first half, leading the visiting Badgers.

Colgate 70, Navy 63: Nelly Cummings had 20 points as the visiting Raiders won their seventh consecutive game.

New Mexico 84, Air Force 78: JaQuan Lyle scored 20 points with four assists before fouling out to lead the host Lobos over the Falcons.