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2 GIs killed in Afghanistan blast are ID'd

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Pentagon identified two American soldiers killed when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb Saturday in southern Afghanistan.

Staff Sgt. Ian Paul McLaughlin, 29, of Newport News, Va., and Pfc. Miguel Angel Villalon, 21, of Joliet, Ill., died after an improvised explosive device struck their vehicle, said a news release from the 82nd Airborne Division. They were assigned to an element of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division out of Fort Bragg, N.C., the statement said.

"When our nation called for its best Airborne combat engineers to deploy into harm's way, Staff Sgt. McLaughlin and Pfc. Villalon answered without hesitation," said the brigade combat team's commander, Col. Art Sellers, in a statement.

Both slain soldiers were on their first combat deployment and each was a recipient of a Purple Heart and the Bronze Star Medal, the military said.

McLaughlin joined the Army in 2012 and leaves behind a wife and four children, the statement said.

His youngest child had been born while he was deployed, his cousin, Rachel Mathes, said in an email.

"He wanted to serve," Mathes said. "He died doing what he wanted to do."

Villalon joined the Army in 2018 and is survived by his mother and father, the statement said.

"They will be honored, mourned, but never forgotten and we are committed to taking care of their families for life," Maj. Gen. James Mingus, the 82nd Airborne Division commander, said in the statement.

Navy won't force Fitzgerald lieutenant from service

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A Navy lieutenant faulted for her role in the USS Fitzgerald's fatal collision will not be forced from the Navy but allowed to exit with an honorable discharge instead, a board of inquiry has decided.

Lt. Natalie Combs, a tactical action officer aboard the destroyer, was censured in April for failure to perform her duties that day. The destroyer collided June 17, 2017, with a container ship, the ACX Crystal, about 60 nautical miles southwest of Yokosuka, where the warship was based. Seven sailors died in the collision.

A Navy board of inquiry Thursday found no reason to force Combs from the Navy after 11 years of service, the Navy Times reported.

Navy officials and Combs' attorney did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

In 2018, Combs and her commanding officer, Cmdr. Bryce Benson, faced criminal charges stemming from the collision,

including negligent dereliction of duty resulting in death and negligent hazarding of a vessel. The charges were dropped last year.

Instead, the two received letters of censure from the secretary of the Navy.

The letter to Benson stated that his "ineffective leadership and poor judgment were causal factors in the collision."

Combs' letter accused her of demonstrating "incompetent and ineffective leadership" for "failure to perform duties," "ineffective communication and failure to make recommendations to the bridge watch team."

Censure letters are public rebukes that draw shame and acknowledge wrongdoing, but do not carry legal implications or affect retirement benefits or pay for the reprimanded officers.

Post-collision reports identified causal factors beyond the actions of the Fitzgerald officers. Several reports pointed to institutional failures.

A Navy report in late 2017 said the accident was "prevent-

able," and listed crew exhaustion, skipped certifications, poor watch-standing and training and manning problems among the causes.

The service has since implemented about 100 changes, including tightened surface warfare officer qualifications, to address these issues.

An August post-collision report by the Japan Transport Safety Board said it was "somewhat likely" that the Fitzgerald was "not properly on the lookout" for ACX Crystal. That report also listed other contributing factors, including the ACX Crystal's failure to sound danger signals or contact the Fitzgerald before the crash.

The Fitzgerald crash was the first of two deadly collisions in the 7th Fleet in 2017. Ten sailors died when the USS John S. McCain collided with the tanker Alnic MC near Singapore on Aug. 21.

Confusion among McCain watch-standers led to a loss of steering control, and the destroyer crossed into the civilian oil tanker's path, according to a Navy post-collision report.

Latest al-Shabab attack in Kenya kills 3

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya — Al-Shabab extremists killed three people in an assault early Monday in eastern Kenya, its fifth attack in 13 days, police said.

The militants from neighboring Somalia attacked Kamuthe town in Garissa county at 2 a.m., setting fire to a police post and destroying a telecommunication mast, police said in

a report seen by The Associated Press. Three non-Muslim teachers were killed and a Muslim one was abducted, the report said. Another teacher was wounded. The attackers spared the life of a female nurse due to her gender, it added.

Al-Shabab is claiming responsibility for the attack in a terse statement within its "latest news" posted Monday on its official website, Shahada.

Al-Shabab has vowed retribution on Kenya for sending troops to Somalia since 2011 to fight the militants. The group has carried out numerous attacks on Kenya, killing hundreds.

Earlier this month, the al-Qaida-linked group attacked a military base used by Kenyan and U.S. forces, killing three Americans and destroying aircraft and other machinery.

AFMC first in Air Force to change PT rules

BY BRIAN FERGUSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force Materiel Command will start offering no-risk “mock” fitness assessments this month to airmen to reduce the stress of testing and promote year-round fitness, it said in a statement.

“The practice tests aim to both motivate Airmen to maintain a year-round exercise and fitness program while reducing the stress many face during testing,” AFMC Military Personnel and Programs branch chief Lt. Col. Rachel Marazita said Friday on the command’s website.

“Fear of failed physical training tests and the potential of ca-

reer-ending disciplinary action is a major stressor that we are looking to eliminate through a sound testing protocol coupled with an organizational culture of fitness,” Marazita added.

Under the new rule, which takes effect on Jan. 20, airmen who are current on their fitness assessments may attempt up to three of the mock tests, which the AFMC calls diagnostic assessments, starting as early as 45 days before their official assessment month and up to 15 days before their PT test due date, officials said.

If an airman completes and passes the practice test, they can elect to have the assessment count as their official test.

The fitness assessment includes pushups, situps, a body composition assessment and a 1.5-mile run.

The idea of allowing airmen to take a no-fail, trial-run fitness assessment before the real thing was first floated in August by Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth Wright. The Air Force has not yet announced changes to PT tests.

“As the Air Force continues to review the overall current fitness assessment guidance for Airmen, AFMC has elected to implement diagnostic testing as a potential part of the policy change,” the AFMC statement said.

There are currently no Air

Force regulations governing diagnostic testing. The AFMC policy allowing practice PT tests will remain in place until a new Air Force policy is published, the statement said.

All AFMC airmen will be eligible to take the diagnostic test, regardless of where they are based, it added.

AFMC is one of the service’s major commands and includes 80,000 military and civilian workers, its website says. It manages and maintains the service’s weapons systems, and its components include the Air Force Research Laboratory, Nuclear Weapons Center and the Installation and Mission Support Center.

Congress overrules Pentagon plan to limit benefits transfer

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

Service members with more than 16 years in the military may continue to transfer their GI Bill education benefits to their dependents, according to a Navy Personnel Command directive issued Friday.

In the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress killed a plan by the Defense Department to do away with an upper limit for transferring those benefits.

Service members must still have a minimum of six years in the military, however, to transfer their college tuition assistance benefits to a family member. They also must commit to another four years of active duty or in the Selected Reserve.

The Pentagon proposed the 16-year cap, which was scheduled to take effect Sunday, but Congress specifically prohibited the measure in the authorization act, according to the Navy directive. The policy’s

cancellation applies to all service branches.

Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., who worked to include that language in this year’s authorization act, said the DOD policy “would have wronged those vets who are willing and able

‘Ending this plan once and for all is the right thing to do.’

Rep. Joe Courtney
D-Conn.

to continue their service” in a statement last month. “The Defense Department’s plan to restrict our longest-serving service members from transferring those GI Bill benefits falls far short of honoring their sacrifice,” he said. “Ending this plan once and for all is the right thing to do, and I am grateful for the bipartisan support that has made this possible.”

The policy was controversial within the military community. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America had submitted a petition signed by 54,000 supporters and veterans to the Pentagon after the department announced the now-canceled policy.

The veterans group called the policy “a completely unnecessary attack on this critical benefit,” in a statement after submitting the petition in September 2018.

“In a time of war, it remains critically important to recruit and retain qualified service members, especially with an ever-decreasing pool of eligible recruits,” the statement said. “And, it remains essential that our government honor its promise to our veterans.”

When veterans’ advocates criticized the restriction, defense officials in July said the transfers were intended as a retention tool and not as a benefit to career service members.

Bible dedicated to Space Force in ceremony

The Washington Post

Religious leaders blessed a King James Bible at the Washington National Cathedral on Sunday to be used by the newly formed United States Space Force, including for swearing-in ceremonies, a cathedral spokeswoman said.

During the three-minute ceremony, the Right Rev. Carl Wright, the Episcopal Church’s bishop suffragan for the Armed Forces and Federal Ministries, said in part, “May this Bible guard and guide all those who purpose that the final frontier be a place where God will triumph over evil, where love will triumph over hate and where life will triumph over death.”

The ceremony was also overseen by Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, dean of the Washington National Cathedral, and Maj. Gen. Steven Schaick, chief of chaplains for the U.S. Air Force.

The Bible was donated by the Museum of the Bible in Washington.

US troops work to clean up Iraq base after Iran strike

Associated Press

AL ASAD AIR BASE, Iraq — U.S. troops cleared rubble and debris from a military base housing American soldiers in western Iraq on Monday, days after it was struck by a barrage of Iranian ballistic missiles in a major escalation between the two longtime foes.

The Iranian attack was in retaliation for the U.S. drone strike near Baghdad airport that killed a top Iranian commander, Gen. Qassem Soleimani, prompting angry calls to avenge his slaying.

An Associated Press crew touring al Asad Air Base on Monday saw large craters in the ground and damaged military trailers as well as forklifts lifting rubble and loading it onto trucks from a large area the size of a football stadium. U.S. soldiers inspected portable housing units destroyed and burned by the missile attack.

The air base in Anbar province is a sprawling complex about 110 miles west of Baghdad shared with the Iraqi military and housing about 1,500

members of the U.S. military and the U.S.-led coalition fighting Islamic State militants.

It was struck by Iranian missiles on Wednesday in Iran's most direct assault on America since the 1979 seizing of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The proxy attack raised fears of a wider war in the Middle East although both sides have since then indicated that neither side would seek further retaliation, at least in the short term.

The U.S. said no American soldiers were killed or wounded in the Iranian attack.

"There were more than 10 large missiles fired and the impact hit several areas along the airfield," said Col. Myles Caggins, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIS in Iraq and Syria. He added that the explosions created large craters, knocked over concrete barriers and destroyed facilities that house dozens of soldiers.

Although no soldiers were killed, he said several were treated for concussions from the blast and are being assessed by professionals.

Iraq's Q-West eyed for US exit amid conflict

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

QAYARAAIRFIELDWEST, Iraq — U.S. officials had been discussing pulling out of some Iraqi bases to consolidate the American and allied troop presence in the country, but conflict with Iran and calls from Baghdad for foreign troops to withdraw have left those plans in limbo.

The coalition part of this base in northern Iraq, known as Q-West, was a likely first candidate to be shuttered, officials here said in late December, shortly before the escalation of tensions between Washington and Tehran on Iraqi soil.

At Q-West, things are still "up in the air," an unnamed defense official told Stars and Stripes last week.

Weeks ago, the U.S. commander at the base had been planning for a potential drawdown, though no final decisions had yet been made.

On Christmas Day, Lt. Col. Stephen Thibodeau said he was optimistic about Iraqi government forces' improving ability to develop intelligence and rely on their own systems for combat support in the fight against Islamic State.

"The conditions on the ground have created a huge opportunity to get smaller while getting better," said Thibodeau,

who is also head of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Field Artillery Regiment, out of Fort Wainwright, Alaska.

But then a deadly rocket attack hit a coalition base about 100 miles east of Q-West, escalating tensions and triggering a chain of events including the U.S. drone strike that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani outside Baghdad International Airport.

It's unclear what the tensions will mean for Q-West, which has been home to thousands of U.S. troops over the years, including elements of the 101st Airborne Division, which was based here following the 2003 invasion.

The base was returned to the Iraqi air force in 2010 before falling to ISIS four years later.

As the insurgent group was forced out of northern Iraq, it destroyed much of Q-West. But Army engineers rebuilt the base, which has been used as a logistics hub and fire base since 2016.

With the Middle East bracing for a possible new conflict, instead of paring down its numbers, the U.S. has sent thousands more troops to the region.

Despite a leaked military memo last week suggesting that the coalition was preparing to pull out of Iraq, Pentagon leaders quickly said the U.S. had no plans to do so.

Videos show Iranian police dispersing protests over plane

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Online videos appeared to show Iranian security forces firing live ammunition and tear gas to disperse protests as popular anger swelled Monday over the accidental shootdown of a Ukrainian jetliner and Iran's failed attempt to conceal its role in the tragedy.

The unrest comes amid soaring tensions between Washington and Tehran that have raised fears of a war between the two countries after a U.S. airstrike killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Iran responded with a ballistic missile attack on two bases

housing U.S. troops in Iraq, without hurting anyone. It accidentally shot down the plane hours later as it braced for a U.S. counterattack that never came.

Videos sent to the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran and later verified by The Associated Press show a crowd of demonstrators near Azadi, or Freedom, Square fleeing as a tear gas canister lands among them. People cough and sputter while trying to escape the fumes, with one woman calling out in Farsi: "They fired tear gas at people! Azadi Square! Death to the dictator!"

Another video shows a woman being

carried away in the aftermath as a trail of blood can be seen on the ground. Those around her cry out that she has been shot in the leg.

Tehran's police chief, Gen. Hossein Rahimi, later denied his officers opened fire.

"Police treated people who had gathered with patience and tolerance," Iranian media quoted Rahimi as saying. "Police did not shoot in the gatherings since broad-mindedness and restraint has been the agenda of the police forces of the capital."

However, the semi-official Fars news agency reported that police had "shot tear gas in some areas."

Study: No regrets from most women 5 years after abortion

The Washington Post

There's been quite a lot of research about women's emotions immediately following an abortion. Some experience sadness, guilt and anger; others feel relief. For many, it's a mix of all of these and more. But what about in the long term?

Researchers from the University of California at San Francisco delved into this question in an analysis of 667 women recruited from 30 sites across the country as part of the Turnaway Study — a landmark body of research about how abortion affects women physically, socially, emotionally and economically.

Starting one week after their abortions and then twice yearly after that, the women were asked about their feelings. The authors said they wondered about stigma and how the

women would reflect on their decisions as time passed.

What they found was a surprise: Over time, all emotions, good and bad, faded.

"A really interesting finding is how the intensity of all emotions is so low," said Corinne Rocca, lead author of the study and a UCSF associate professor of obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences.

A week after their abortions, about 51% of women expressed mostly positive emotions, 17% expressed negative emotions and 20% said they had none or few.

As time went by, the number who felt few or no emotions rose sharply. At the five-year mark, 84% reported either primarily positive emotions or none at all, while 6% had primarily negative feelings. There was "no evidence" of new negative or

positive emotions, the authors said.

Immediately after their abortions, 95% of those who agreed to interviews said they had made the right decision. At five years, that percentage increased to 99%.

Rocca was careful to point out that a woman's feelings of regret and her judgment that an abortion was the correct decision for her under the circumstances are different things: "You can feel the emotion of regret, yet feel you did what was right for you."

"What this study is showing is that there is a small minority who do regret their abortions," Rocca said. "I in no way want to reduce the struggles of those who regret their abortions, but it is misguided to take away the options for everyone based on this minority."

Queen OKs part-time for Harry and Meghan

Associated Press

SANDRINGHAM, England — Queen Elizabeth II agreed Monday to grant Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, their wish for a more independent life, allowing them to move part-time to Canada while remaining firmly in the House of Windsor.

The British monarch said in a statement that the summit of senior royals on Monday was "constructive," and that it had been "agreed that there will be a period of transition" in which the Duke and Duchess of Sussex will spend time in Canada and the UK.

The summit at the queen's Sandringham estate in eastern England marked the first face-to-face talks with Harry since he and Meghan unveiled the controversial plan to step back from their royal roles.

"My family and I are entirely supportive of Harry and Meghan's desire to create a new life as a young family," the queen said in a statement. "Although we would have preferred them to remain full-time working members of the Royal Family, we respect and understand their wish to live a more independent life as a family while remaining a valued part of my family."

The meeting came after days of intense news coverage, in which supporters of the royal family's feuding factions used the British media to paint conflicting pictures of who was to blame for the rift.

Buckingham Palace said "a range of possibilities" would be discussed, but the queen was determined to resolve the situation within "days, not weeks." Buckingham Palace stressed, however, that "any decision will take time to be implemented."

One of the more fraught questions that needs to be worked out is precisely what it means for a royal to be financially independent and what activities can be undertaken to make money.

'Joker' leads with 11 Oscar nominations

Associated Press

Todd Phillips' much-debated supervillain origin story and R-rated box-office smash "Joker" topped all films with 11 Academy Awards nominations, while Martin Scorsese's elegiac crime epic "The Irishman," Quentin Tarantino's 1960s Los Angeles fairy tale "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" and Sam Mendes' World War I tale "1917" all trailed close behind with 10 nods apiece.

Those four were among the nine films nominated for best picture, in nominations announced Monday to the 92nd Academy Awards. The others were: "Parasite," "Little Women," "Marriage Story," "Jojo Rabbit" and "Ford v Ferrari."

For the 87th time, the academy selected all-male directing nominees despite a year in which women made historic gains behind the camera. The

most likely candidate was Greta Gerwig ("Little Women"), who was the last woman nominated, two years ago for "Lady Bird." "Congratulations to those men," said Issa Rae, who presented the nominees alongside John Cho.

There were some surprises. Awkwafina, who was poised to become just the second Asian American nominated for best actress (the first, 1936 nominee Merle Oberon, hid her South Asian heritage), wasn't nominated for her acclaimed leading performance in "The Farewell." Also overlooked was "Frozen 2," the highest grossing animated film ever; Beyonce, for her "Lion King" song; and the hit documentary "Apollo 11."

Most glaringly, Jennifer Lopez, long considered a supporting actress front-runner for her performance in "Hustlers," was also denied her first Oscar nomination.

Those oversights left the Oscars with their least diverse field since the fallout of #OscarsSoWhite pushed the film academy to diversify its membership. The only actor of color nominated was British actress Cynthia Erivo for her portrayal of Harriet Tubman in "Harriet."

The other nominees for best actress are: Scarlett Johansson, "Marriage Story"; Saoirse Ronan, "Little Women"; Charlize Theron, "Bombshell"; and Renee Zellweger, "Judy."

The nominees for best actor are: Antonio Banderas, "Pain and Glory"; Leonardo DiCaprio, "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood"; Adam Driver, "Marriage Story"; Jonathan Pryce, "The Two Popes"; and Joaquin Phoenix, "Joker."

The Academy Awards will take place without a host for the second straight year on Feb. 9 in Los Angeles.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Firefighters involved in selfie to be disciplined

MI DETROIT — Firefighters involved in the photo taken outside a burning building will be disciplined for the “momentary lapse in judgment.”

Detroit Fire Commissioner Eric Jones said in a news release the 18 firefighters involved in the photo “will be held accountable” but because of the nature of the personnel incident, he cannot give specifics on the punishments.

The photo was originally posted on the “Detroit Fire Incidents Page” on Facebook with the caption “crews take a moment to get a selfie on New Years!” In the background is a house engulfed in flames. That post has since been taken down.

Zoo seeks nominations to name its new giraffe

LA BATON ROUGE — The zoo in Louisiana’s capital city is asking for the public’s help to name its newest male giraffe.

The Baton Rouge Zoo is holding a contest for people to nominate their favorite names for the facility’s latest addition, born last month.

Nominations will be accepted through Jan. 22.

Historic tavern to stay open after deal reached

NY NEW YORK — A 190-year-old New York City tavern where scenes from the movie “Goodfellas” were filmed will stay open thanks to a deal reached by the bar’s owner and his landlord, city officials said.

Mayor Bill de Blasio and the Queens Chamber of Commerce announced “a handshake

agreement” between Loycent Gordon, the owner of Neir’s Tavern, and property owners Ken and Henry Shi.

Man reunited with late wife’s lost wedding ring

IN RICHMOND — An eastern Indiana man who spent months heartbroken after losing his late wife’s wedding ring while out shopping has been reunited with the gold band thanks to a posting on social media.

Charles McNally was shopping in September when the wedding ring his wife of 56 years, Barbara, had worn until her death in April 2018 slipped off his finger.

His daughter, Angela McNally, posted a message on Facebook shortly after the ring vanished asking for helping finding the band, which is engraved on the inside with, “Because I love you.”

Richmond resident Destry Glover had found the ring in the self-checkout lanes of a Walmart store. Glover returned the ring to Charles McNally.

Ice Castles open despite warmer temps

NH NORTH WOODSTOCK — Organizers of annual hand-crafted ice castle sculptures in New Hampshire said the popular tourist attraction opened despite the warmer weather in the area.

The frozen attraction is located in six places across North America, including in North Woodstock. The castles include LED-lit sculptures, frozen thrones, ice-carved tunnels, slides and fountains.

Melissa Smuzynski, the marketing director for Ice Castles, said they would open later if conditions are “pre-

carious.” Rain can cause slick conditions.

Elk dies after eating corn left by landowner

WI MILWAUKEE — Authorities said an elk was found dead in northern Wisconsin after it ate corn put out by a landowner in a misguided attempt to help wildlife.

The Department of Natural Resources said the animal found dead on Jan. 2 died from rumen acidosis, a direct result from eating the corn. The condition affects deer and elk when their diet is changed too rapidly from natural, high-fiber browse to low-fiber, high-carbohydrate supplemental feeds.

College student on hike is bitten by gator

FL MIAMI — An alligator bit an 18-year-old college student who was hiking with a group at the Everglades National Park, officials said.

The Miami Herald reported that a professor and about 15 students were wading through the water on a wet trail near the Pahayokee Overlook southwest of Miami when the reptile bit the young woman’s lower leg.

Everglades National Park’s spokeswoman Allyson Gantt said the student suffered two small puncture wounds and described the injury as “low pain.”

County looks to repeal ‘English-only’ ordinance

MD WESTMINSTER — Commissioners in a Maryland county are looking to repeal a 2013 ordinance that made English the official language of the community.

The Carroll County Board of Commissioners unanimously

voted to hold a public hearing about undoing the law, The Carroll County Times reported.

The ordinance requires all county documents, publications, hearing notices and public business to be written or conducted in English only, according to county attorney Tim Burke.

Police: Man jumping between rooftops dies

PA PHILADELPHIA — Police said a man jumping between rooftops of a north Philadelphia apartment building plunged to his death over the weekend.

A police spokesman said witnesses told officers just before 2 a.m. that they were jumping between the rooftops of their apartment after consuming alcohol at an event earlier in the evening.

They told officers that the 23-year-old man failed to make a jump and fell two stories, hitting his head on the ground.

Diabetic man reunited with missing service dog

MS OCEAN SPRINGS — A Mississippi man with type 1 diabetes has been reunited with his missing service dog that was scared off by fireworks late last month.

The black Labrador retriever named Bella, outfitted with a microchip and a red and black collar that identifies her as the “Best Dog Ever,” was finally spotted less than a mile from the Cokely family’s home.

Bella is able to sense when his blood sugar is too high or low and he needs to take his medicine, Jacob Cokely, 19, said.

From wire reports

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Chiefs come back from 24 points down to top Texans

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes stalked up and down the sideline like a field marshal rallying his troops, the brilliant young quarterback imploring the Kansas City Chiefs to stay together even as the Houston Texans were on the verge of taking them apart.

The Chiefs already faced a 24-0 hole, bigger than any deficit they had overcome in franchise history.

“The biggest thing I was preaching,” Mahomes said later, “was, ‘Let’s go do something special. Everybody is counting us out. Let’s go out there and play by play put it out there.’ And play by play, we did what we were supposed to do.”

Beginning with the first of his five touchdown passes, Mahomes and the Chiefs slowly chipped away at Houston’s seemingly insurmountable lead. They continued to pick up momentum, outscoring the Texans 28-0 during the second quarter alone, and eventually reeled off 41 consecutive points before cruising the rest of the way to a 51-31 victory Sunday that propelled Kansas City back to the AFC championship game for the second consecutive season.

In doing so, the Chiefs (13-4) became the first team in NFL history to win a playoff game by at least 20 points after trailing by at least 20. They

matched the fourth-biggest comeback in playoff history while winning a postseason game in back-to-back seasons for the first time. Travis Kelce and Damien Williams scored three touchdowns apiece, joining the 49ers’ Jerry Rice and Ricky Watters in Super Bowl 29 as the only teammates to score that many times in a postseason game.

Meanwhile, Mahomes led by example as much as by voice. He finished with 321 yards passing, becoming the first player in postseason history with at least 300 yards passing and five touchdowns while running for at least 50 more yards.

“You saw him going up and down the bench, he was talking to everybody, — ‘Just settle down,’” Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. “As a head coach, you can’t ask for more than that. When he’s the leader of your team and he’s going, ‘Hey, we’re going to be fine. Let’s not wait for the fourth quarter. Let’s go!’ And he did that.”

Now, after losing to the Patriots in overtime in last year’s conference title game, the Chiefs are back on the brink of their first Super Bowl appearance in 50 years. They will host Tennessee next Sunday in a rematch from earlier this season after the Titans upset Lamar Jackson and the top-seeded Baltimore Ravens on Saturday night.

Johnson elected to Hall

Associated Press

Jimmy Johnson, who coached the Dallas Cowboys to two Super Bowl championships in the 1990s, has been elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

The hall announced his selection Sunday night as part of a centennial class that was chosen on Wednesday by a special committee. Former Pittsburgh Steelers coach Bill Cowher was revealed Saturday night as the other coach being inducted.

“The only thing I can think of is all the assistant coaches who worked for me, all the great players who played for me are the reason,” said a teary-eyed Johnson, 76. “I can’t talk.”

“This is so special to me because when you put in the work that we put in, it is nice for those people to appreciate it.”

One of his best players, Hall of Fame quarterback Troy Aikman, could be seen tearing up as he heard the announcement from Green Bay, where he was announcing the Seahawks-Packers playoff game.

Hall President David Baker made the presentation during halftime of Fox’s telecast.

A successful college coach at Oklahoma State and Miami, where he won a national championship in 1987, Johnson was hired in 1989 by new Cowboys owner Jerry Jones. His initial team went 1-15, but Johnson rebuilt the roster — including trading star running back Herschel Walker to Minnesota for a slew of draft picks and players who were converted into draft choices. That deal is considered among the most one-sided in sports history, and it netted, among others, the draft pick that brought Emmitt Smith to Dallas.

Johnson left the Cowboys after back-to-back championships in the 1992 and ’93 seasons in a dispute with Jones. But the roster he built, under his college rival Barry Switzer, won the 1995 NFL crown, too.

Packers thwart Seahawks’ rally

Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Aaron Rodgers and the Green Bay Packers have relied more on character and resilience than offense or defense this season, lagging well behind past editions in aesthetics.

This divisional round win over Seattle, though, was a vintage Rodgers performance. He helped the Packers pull within a game of the Super Bowl with an array of clutch completions at the most critical of moments.

Rodgers connected with Davante Adams eight times for 160 yards and two touchdowns, Green Bay’s spruced-up defense fended off a spirited Seahawks rally, and the Packers held on for a 28-23 victory Sunday night to reach the NFC championship game for the third time in six years.

“It’s one of those feelings that starts to creep up in warmups, when you really feel like you’re locked in,” Rodgers said, “I was glad it translated to the field.”

Aaron Jones rushed for 62 yards and two first-half scores for the Packers (14-3), who will travel next weekend to take on top-seeded San Francisco. Rodgers, who went 16-for-27 for 243 yards in his 17th career postseason start, Rodgers has 38 touchdown passes in the playoffs. That’s good for fifth in league history.

“He’s definitely hungry for another Super Bowl. He deserves it, so we’re doing everything in our power to put him in that position,” said Adams, who set Green Bay’s postseason record for receiving yards.

Russell Wilson carried the Seahawks (12-6) on yet another

comeback, this time from a 21-3 halftime deficit, but the Packers forced a punt shortly before the two-minute warning on the second sack of the game by Preston Smith. That was Green Bay’s fifth of the game.

“Five minutes left, we’re getting the ball back, the thing’s going to be over. We’re going to win it,” Wilson said. “I think everybody in the stadium, and I think everybody watching felt like that, too.”

The Seahawks never got the ball again.

Rodgers sealed the win with two third-down throws: a 32-yard strike to Adams on third-and-8 with 2:19 left and then for 9 yards to Jimmy Graham on third-and-9 right after the two-minute warning to take down a Seahawks team that was 8-1 on the road this season.

NBA roundup

Jokic, Nuggets withstand Clippers' rally

Associated Press

DENVER — The Denver Nuggets put an ugly loss behind them with a statement win over a top-tier team.

Nikola Jokic had 20 points and 15 rebounds, and the Nuggets withstood a big rally to beat the Los Angeles Clippers 114-104 on Sunday night.

This bounce-back performance was just what they needed to soothe their psyche after a clunker the night before against a struggling Cleveland squad.

"We looked like a totally different team less than 24 hours later," guard Monte Morris said.

The moral was easy to decipher: "We have to come to play against teams we're supposed to beat," Morris said. "Because we always show up against teams we know that can beat us."

Trailing by as many 20 points in the second half, Los Angeles had pulled within six with 1:11 remaining when Patrick Beverley was called for a foul on Jokic. After the Nuggets big man made a pair of free throws, Clippers coach Doc Rivers argued with official Nick Buchert. Rivers was given two technical fouls and tossed from the game. Jamal Murray hit both free throws to restore some much-needed breathing room.

Nets 108, Hawks 86: Kyrie Irving scored 21 points in 20 minutes of an easy return from a two-month absence with an injured right shoulder, leading Brooklyn to a win at Atlanta.

Irving shot 10-for-11 from the field after missing 26 games with an impingement. The shoulder looked fine and his handle looked as good as ever while he dribbled his way around a hopeless Atlanta defense.

Energized by his return that still seemed a ways away just a week ago, the Nets led by 39 points and won their second straight after dropping seven in a row.

Cam Reddish scored 20 points for the Hawks. They played without star guard Trae Young because of a left hamstring injury and lost their fourth straight.

Jazz 127, Wizards 116: Bojan Bogdanovic scored 31 points, Rudy Gobert added 21 points and 14 rebounds and Utah beat host Washington for its ninth straight victory.

Utah overcame a 15-point deficit in the third quarter to win for the 14th time in 15 games.

Bradley Beal scored 25 points for the Wizards after missing five games with right leg soreness.

Spurs 105, Raptors 104: DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, Rudy Gay had 15 and visiting San Antonio overcame an 18-point deficit to beat Toronto.

The Spurs used a big fourth quarter to win for the third time in four games. Derrick White scored 13 points for San Antonio, and LaMarcus Aldridge had 11. DeRozan also had eight rebounds and four assists against his former team.

Serge Ibaka had 21 points and a season-

high 15 rebounds for the Raptors. Kyle Lowry had 16 points and a season-high 15 assists.

Suns 100, Hornets 92: Kelly Oubre Jr. had 25 points and 15 rebounds in host Phoenix's victory over Charlotte.

Oubre scored 15 points in the second half on a night when Suns star guard Devin Booker struggled from the floor, shooting 3 of 12. He had 12 points and nine assists.

Deandre Ayton added 18 points and nine rebounds for Phoenix.

Grizzlies 122, Warriors 102: Jonas Valanciunas had 31 points and a season-high 19 rebounds and Memphis handed visiting Golden State its eighth straight loss.

Valanciunas was 13 of 17 from the field, including a three-pointer to help the Grizzlies win their fifth straight. Jaren Jackson Jr. finished with 21 points, and Ja Morant had 11 points and 10 assists. D'Angelo Russell led the Warriors with 34 points in his return from a right shoulder injury.

Knicks 124, Heat 121: Julius Randle scored 26 points, RJ Barrett chipped in 23 and New York rallied to beat Miami.

Kevin Knox had 17 points off the bench and Reggie Bullock added 16 to help the Knicks snap a five-game losing streak.

Jimmy Butler had 25 points and 10 rebounds for the Heat.

Top 25 roundup

Unranked Boilermakers rout No. 8 Spartans

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Trevion Williams scored 16 points and Purdue held No. 8 Michigan State to its two lowest scoring halves of the season and lowest point total in nearly eight years with a 71-42 upset.

The Boilermakers (10-7, 4-3 Big Ten) snapped a two-game skid by picking up their second win this season over a Top 10 foe. They also beat defending national champion Virginia on Dec. 4.

Cassius Winston finished

with 10 points to lead the Spartans (13-4, 5-1) but also had nine turnovers as Michigan State's eight-game winning streak ended. The Spartans, who were 4½-point road favorites, hadn't lost since Dec. 3. They were held almost 40 points below their season scoring average of 81.3.

Minnesota 75, No. 19 Michigan 67: Daniel Oturu scored a career-high 30 points and the host Gophers went on a late 11-0 run to beat the Wolverines.

Marcus Carr had 21 points and 12 assists for Minnesota

(9-7, 3-3 Big Ten), while Alihan Demir scored 13 points.

No. 21 Memphis 68, South Florida 64: Precious Achiuwa had 22 points and 11 rebounds and the Tigers rallied from a 14-point second-half deficit to beat the host Bulls and stop a two-game losing streak.

Tyler Harris finished with 17 points for Memphis (13-3, 2-1 American Athletic Conference), which held USF (8-9, 1-3) scoreless from the field for the final 6:37.

Lester Quinones scored 13 for the Tigers.

No. 23 Wichita State 89, UConn 86 (2OT): The Shockers blew a nine-point lead in the final minute of regulation but outlasted the host Huskies.

Oregon State 82, No. 24 Arizona 65: Tres Tinkle scored 20 points and the host Beavers pulled away to beat the Wildcats.

No. 25 Colorado 91, Utah 52: Tyler Bey and Evan Battey recorded double-doubles and McKinley Wright IV had 16 points, eight assists and seven rebounds as the Buffaloes routed the host Utes.

NHL roundup

Devils fire GM, end Lightning win streak

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — The New Jersey Devils are starting to play their best hockey of the season and it cost the Tampa Bay Lightning their franchise-record tying 10-game winning streak.

The improved play wasn't enough to save the job of Devils general manager Ray Shero.

Louis Domingue stopped 26 shots against his former team as the Devils handed the Lightning their first loss since Dec. 21 with a 3-1 victory Sunday night.

The Devils' second win in two days — they beat Washington on Saturday — came with a bizarre twist. Shero was fired by owner Josh Harris earlier in the afternoon and most of the players didn't find out until 90 minutes before the opening faceoff.

"You beat two of the best teams in the league back-to-back nights, prove to yourself you got what it takes in this locker room and that's a lot of fun," forward Blake Coleman said. "On the other side of the coin, a great leader isn't with us anymore and he's the reason we're all in this room."

Predators 1, Jets 0: John Hynes is getting quality play from his goaltenders since tak-

ing over as head coach of Nashville on Tuesday.

Hynes was behind the bench Sunday for his third game and watched as backup Juuse Saros made 28 saves for his first shutout of the season in a victory over visiting Winnipeg.

On Thursday night, veteran netminder Pekka Rinne scored his first career goal in a 5-2 victory over Chicago.

"I thought the guys in front of (Saros) defended really well, but any time a goaltender gets a shutout he's got to make some huge saves," said Hynes, who's 2-1-0 with a loss to Boston on the day he took over from a fired Peter Laviolette.

The Predators are 3-1-1 in their past five games to improve to 21-16-7.

Connor Hellebuyck stopped 31 shots for the Jets. They have lost six straight at home.

"It's not like we've been six in a row at home that have been terrible," Winnipeg forward Andrew Copp said. "It's kind of been intermixed with one-offs here and one-offs there. I mean, we've got to right the ship and figure out what to do, but we've had success here for a long time. I don't think it's a long-term issue, but definitely something we got to worry about for next game."

Nashville captain Roman Josi had his points streak end at 12 games. He had 20 points (seven goals and 13 assists) during the career-high run and franchise record for defensemen. It was the NHL's longest active streak.

Penguins 4, Coyotes 3 (SO): Teddy Blueger scored the deciding goal in the eighth round of the shootout to lift Pittsburgh to a win at Arizona.

Jared McCann, Patric Hornqvist and Brandon Tanev scored in regulation to help the Penguins sweep a three-game Western trip. Tristan Jarry had 25 saves.

Taylor Hall had a goal and an assist for the Coyotes. Conor Garland and Derek Stepan also scored, and Adin Hill made 30 saves.

Panthers 8, Maple Leafs 4: Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and an assist, surpassing Olli Jokinen for Florida's career points lead with 420, and the host Panthers beat Toronto.

Mike Hoffman scored twice, and Aleksander Barkov and Vincent Trocheck each had a goal and two assists. Frank Vatrano, Mike Matheson and Josh Brown also scored in Florida's highest-scoring game of the season. Chris Driedger made 43 saves.

Mitch Marner scored twice for the Maple Leafs, and Zach Hyman had a goal and two assists. John Tavares also scored. Toronto goaltender Frederik Andersen allowed four goals on 12 shots before he was pulled 49 seconds into the second period. Michael Hutchinson stopped 13 shots.

Canucks 4, Wild 1: Elias Pettersson scored his 21st goal and fellow All-Star Jacob Markstrom stopped 23 shots in Vancouver's victory at Minnesota.

Bo Horvat added two goals — the second into an empty net with 5.7 seconds left — and Troy Stecher also scored for the Canucks. They've won nine of 11 and picked up their second win in two days.

Sabres 5, Red Wings 1: Evan Rodrigues scored twice in the first five minutes and Buffalo cruised to a win at NHL-worst Detroit.

Rodrigues entered with no goals in 25 games this season. Zemgus Girgensons also scored in the first period for the Sabres, Zach Bogosian and Rasmus Ristolainen added goals, and Linus Ullmark made 21 saves.

Madison Bowey scored for the Red Wings.

Smith wins playoff for Sony Open title

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Two weeks in Hawaii brought rain, unusually strong wind, playoffs and two players who thought victory was out of reach until the winner's lei was draped around their necks.

Cameron Smith was the latest Sunday at the Sony Open.

He might have been even more surprised than Justin Thomas, who got a second chance when he won a playoff at Kapalua.

"Two or three holes left, I really didn't think there was much of a shot," Smith said after his playoff victory over Brendan

Steele on rain-soaked Waialae Country Club. "I knew I had to play some good golf. It just kind of all fell into place."

He twice pulled within shot of the lead at various points Sunday, but it looked like a lost cause when Steele had a two-shot lead with two holes to play.

"I thought I had to birdie 17 and then do something really good on 18," Smith said. "You never know what can happen."

Just about everything did in the final hour, which is about how long it took to play the last two holes. It rained every day since Tuesday, and the rain was so steady on Sunday the PGA Tour moved the hole

location from its traditional spot to higher ground, and the green still had to be rolled with sponges between groups.

"My first individual win on the PGA Tour, it's definitely going to be one I never forget," Smith said. "Given the conditions and how tough it was, I'll draw back on this in the future."

For the week, Smith made 21 birdies for \$10,500 toward the Australian fires relief fund, along with other contributions from the PGA Tour and \$125,000 from the International team at the Presidents Cup.

Smith's uncle lives in New South Wales and lost everything but a shed.