

ISIS detainees in Syria moved after uprising

By **CHAD GARLAND**
Stars and Stripes

Thousands of Islamic State fighters jailed in Syria had to be hustled to a more secure facility in the midst of a 10-day prison siege by the militants aimed at freeing them, according to U.S. officials.

On Sunday, the U.S.-allied Syrian Democratic Forces announced they had retaken the al-Sinaa prison in the northeastern city of Hassakeh after “eliminating the last enclaves” of ISIS fighters barricaded in dormitories.

The attempted prison break, which began Jan. 20, “ultimately sped up the clock to ensuring the detainees are in a hardened facility from which they will never escape,” Army Brig. Gen. Isaac Peltier, commander of the Special Operations Joint Task Force-Levant, said Sunday in a separate statement. Peltier called the attack a “huge ISIS failure.”

Had they succeeded, the mili-

itants likely would have carried out further attacks in Hassakeh and elsewhere, the SDF said in a statement Monday, adding that the assault was part of a long-planned operation that drew militants from neighboring Iraq.

Detainees were still being accounted for late Monday, said Maj. Chuck An, a spokesman for the U.S.-led special operations task force, in an email to Stars and Stripes.

The Hassakeh facility is one of the largest in the region housing ISIS members captured on the battlefield during the campaign that began in 2014 to liberate swaths of the country from their control.

The Kurdish-led SDF was recovering remains and clearing the area, the joint task force said. The command provides training, assistance, advice and operational support to partner forces.

The coalition backed the SDF

with real-time surveillance, airstrikes and limited ground forces to suppress the prison break. The U.S. Army’s Bradley Fighting Vehicles helped establish a perimeter to contain the fighting.

Using car bombs and suicide belts, dozens of militants had overrun the facility, while prisoners inside rioted. They took some of the hundreds of child detainees hostage and used them as human shields during the battle for control of the prison, Kurdish officials have said.

After negotiations with the SDF, most of the fighters surrendered and released their hostages, and SDF fighters killed or captured senior leaders of the militant group, the coalition said.

The U.S.-led coalition has warned of likely ISIS attempts to free its members from the makeshift detention facilities, where inmates have staged several riots in recent years in attempts to es-

cape.

This month’s prison break was the biggest ISIS operation since the group was ousted from its territorial “caliphate” in 2019, The Associated Press reported.

The SDF had said Wednesday that it gained full control of the facility after the surrender of over 3,000 detainees, but clashes resumed when a sweep uncovered dozens of armed fighters holed up in a dormitory basement.

At the new, more secure facility where the detainees were taken, the SDF will use biometrics to enroll prisoners, an unidentified coalition official told the AP last week. The attackers had initially targeted that facility but failed to take it, the news agency reported.

Some 121 members of the SDF, security forces and prison staffers were killed, including at least four civilians, the SDF said. At least 374 detainees and attackers were killed, it said.

N. Korea confirms latest test missile could reach Guam

By **DAVID CHOI**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea’s state-run news outlet on Monday confirmed it successfully test-fired an intermediate-range ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States territory of Guam.

The Korean Central News Agency announced the country had fired a Hwasong-12 missile on Sunday from the northwestern area of North Korea toward the eastern coast “in consideration of the security of neighboring countries.”

The Hwasong-12 is an intermediate-range ballistic missile with an estimated maximum range of 2,796 miles, more than enough distance to reach Guam, accord-

ing to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It was first unveiled — and last tested — by North Korea in 2017, the same year the communist regime tested its first intercontinental ballistic missile.

KCNA added that a camera installed on the missile took a photograph of Earth from space.

Sunday’s launch marks the seventh round of missile tests in January.

The missile’s specifications make it the boldest weapon fired by the North in nearly five years, when U.S. relations with the communist regime were at a low.

The U.S. and North Korea exchanged heated remarks in 2017, when then-President Donald Trump threatened “fire and fu-

ry” against North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, while Pyongyang signaled it was developing plans to “fire at the areas around Guam” using its Hwasong-12 missiles.

Neighboring countries confirmed North Korea had tested an intermediate-range missile on Sunday morning. South Korea’s military said it detected the launch at around 7:52 a.m. and estimated the missile flew about 500 miles at an altitude of 1,240 miles.

“In preparation for additional launches, the military maintains a readiness posture by tracking and monitoring related trends,” South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

Following the launch, Japan’s chief cabinet secretary, Hirokazu

Matsuno, told reporters the missile was airborne for around 30 minutes before splashing down outside Japan’s exclusive economic zone.

North Korea previously pledged to “keep developing powerful warheads” as a deterrent against the U.S. and its allies’ “hostile moves.”

“The practical combat performance of the long-range cruise missile system would hold a reliable share in boosting the war deterrence of the country,” KCNA said in an article Friday. That statement came days after the U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions against six North Koreans, a Russian and a Russian firm suspected of aiding the regime’s weapons program.

Expert: Exercises send message to China

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Military exercises between the United States and its allies in the Western Pacific, both ongoing and upcoming, send a message to China not to pull a “stunt” to distract people at home, according to a New Zealand-based American security expert.

The U.S. Air Force is about to launch Cope North, a large-scale aerial combat, force employment and disaster relief exercise with Japan and Australia, that will involve more than 2,000 sorties on and around Guam, Pacific Air Forces announced in a statement Saturday.

Fighter aircraft from all three nations will take part in counter-air and close-air support missions, according to the statement. They’ll also practice ae-

rial refueling. Counter air means attacking enemy air bases while close air support involves aircraft attacking enemy targets near friendly ground forces.

“These training missions will conclude with a large force employment exercise designed to enhance readiness and interoperability among the three countries,” the statement said.

Interoperability describes the ability of one country’s armed forces to use another country’s training methods and military equipment.

The drills follow last week’s Keen Edge command post exercise involving U.S. and Japanese forces in Japan and the ongoing Marine Exercise 2022 amphibious-assault training involving U.S. sailors and Marines and local forces in the Philippines.

The exercises send a message to China, New Zealand-based security expert Paul Buchanan said Monday.

Internal troubles such as economic and supply disruptions and coronavirus outbreaks could turn powerful Chinese factions against President Xi Jinping, Buchanan predicted.

The Chinese leader hasn’t left Beijing for 700 days, Foreign Policy reported Friday.

“What do authoritarian leaders do when they are concerned about internal challenges?” Buchanan asked. “They do something outside to distract attention.”

The U.S. and its allies are eager to deter China from “pulling a stunt” in the South China Sea or beyond, he said.

“The possibility of Xi intentionally ... using conflict to divert attention from his internal

woes have increased dramatically,” he said. “These exercises increase deterrence.”

The Cope North exercise, which runs from Wednesday to Feb. 18, begins with humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief training, according to a Pacific Air Forces statement.

Training will take place at Andersen Air Force Base and Northwest Field on Guam; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, including Rota, Saipan and Tinian; Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia, the statement said.

Over 2,000 sorties are planned across seven islands and 10 airfields. More than 2,500 U.S. airmen, Marines, and sailors will train alongside about 1,000 from Japan and Australia. Approximately 130 aircraft from over 30 units will fly in the exercise, the statement said.

Passenger terminals to move flight updates from Facebook to USAF sites

By **JONATHAN SNYDER**
Stars and Stripes

Passenger terminals on U.S. military bases are moving their flight schedule information off Facebook and onto official Air Force public websites in February, according to Air Mobility Command.

For 10 years, military passenger terminals have posted 72-hour and 30-day flight information on individual Facebook pages managed by staff at each terminal, Air Mobility Command spokesman Tech. Sgt. Zachary Boyer told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

Soon, that same information will be available on Air Force websites, with a directory on

the AMC website with links to the individual base websites, according to Boyer’s email. Once passenger terminals have transitioned to the official Air Force websites, they will indicate the date they will no longer utilize Facebook and include a link to the website.

Flight schedules and other passenger information will migrate from Facebook to the American Forces Public Information Management System, or AFPIMS, which will provide travelers easy and organized access to that information.

The directory of AMC Passenger Terminal webpages can be found at www.amc.af.mil/AMC-Travel-Site.

Biden wants Navy vet taken in Afghanistan in 2020 freed

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Sunday called for the release of U.S. Navy veteran Mark Frerichs, who was taken hostage in Afghanistan two years ago.

Frerichs, a civil engineer and contractor from Lombard, Ill., was kidnapped in January 2020 from Kabul. He is believed to be in the custody of the Taliban-linked Haqqani network.

“Threatening the safety of Americans or any innocent civilians is always unacceptable, and hostage-taking is an act of particular cruelty and cowardice,” President Joe Biden said in a statement to mark the second anniversary of the kidnapping on Monday.

“The Taliban must immediately release Mark before it can

expect any consideration of its aspirations for legitimacy.”

The statement came as Afghanistan faces a thorny humanitarian crisis following the U.S. withdrawal in August. The Taliban quickly seized control of much of the country and the foreign aid that had been flowing into the country was largely halted, putting at risk the lives of millions of Afghans who could starve or freeze to death.

Charlene Cakora, Frerichs’ sister, issued a statement saying that her family is “grateful” for Biden’s words.

“But what we really want is to have Mark home,” she said. “We know the president has options in front of him to make that happen and hope Mark’s safe return will become a priority for him personally.”

Omicron ups concern on long COVID, causes

Associated Press

More than a year after a bout with COVID-19, Rebekah Hogan still suffers from severe brain fog, pain and fatigue that leave her unable to do her nursing job or handle household activities.

Long COVID has her questioning her worth as a wife and mother.

“Is this permanent? Is this the new norm?” said the 41-year-old Latham, N.Y., woman, whose three children and husband also have signs of the condition. “I want my life back.”

More than a third of COVID-19 survivors, by some estimates, will develop such lingering problems. Now, with omicron sweeping across the globe, scientists are racing to pinpoint the cause of the bedeviling condition and find

treatments before a potential explosion in long COVID cases.

Could it be an autoimmune disorder? That could help explain why long COVID-19 disproportionately affects women, who are more likely than men to develop autoimmune diseases. Could microclots be the cause of symptoms ranging from memory lapses to discolored toes? That could make sense, since abnormal blood clotting can occur in COVID-19.

As these theories and others are tested, there is fresh evidence that vaccination may reduce the chances of developing long COVID.

It's too soon to know whether people infected with the highly contagious omicron variant will develop the mysterious constellation of symptoms, usually diag-

nosed many weeks after the initial illness. But some experts think a wave of long COVID is likely and say doctors need to be prepared for it.

With \$1 billion from Congress, the National Institutes of Health is funding a vast array of research on the condition. And clinics devoted to studying and treating it are popping up around the world, affiliated with places such as Stanford University in California and University College London.

Momentum is building around a few key theories.

One is that the infection or remnants of the virus persist past the initial illness, triggering inflammation that leads to long COVID.

Another is that latent viruses in the body, such as the Epstein-Barr virus that causes mononu-

cleosis, are reactivated. A recent study in the journal *Cell* pointed to Epstein-Barr in the blood as one of four possible risk factors, which also include pre-existing Type 2 diabetes and the levels of coronavirus RNA and certain antibodies in the blood. Those findings must be confirmed with more research.

A third theory is that autoimmune responses develop after acute COVID-19.

In a normal immune response, viral infections activate antibodies that fight invading virus proteins. But sometimes in the aftermath, antibodies remain revved up and mistakenly attack normal cells. That phenomenon is thought to play a role in autoimmune diseases such as lupus and multiple sclerosis.

Cyberattacks hobbling pandemic-weary schools

Associated Press

Cyberattacks have become a growing threat to U.S. schools, with several high-profile incidents reported since last year. And the coronavirus pandemic has compounded their effects: More money has been demanded, and more schools have had to shut down as they scramble to recover data or even manually wipe all laptops.

“Pretty much any way that you cut it, incidents have both been growing more frequent and more significant,” said Doug Levin, director of the K12 Security Information Exchange, a Virginia-based nonprofit that helps schools defend against cybersecurity risk.

Precise data is hard to come by since most schools are not required to publicly report cyberattacks. But experts say public school systems — which often have limited budgets for cybersecurity expertise — have become an inviting target for ransomware gangs.

The pandemic also has forced schools to turn increasingly toward virtual learning, making them more dependent on technology and more vulnerable to cyber-extortion. School systems that have had instruction disrupted include those in Baltimore County in Maryland and Miami-Dade County in Florida, along with districts in New Jersey, Wisconsin and elsewhere.

Levin's group has tracked well over 1,200 cyber security incidents since 2016 at public school districts across the country. They included 209 ransomware attacks, when hackers lock data up and charge to unlock it; 53 “denial of service” attacks, where attackers sabotage or slow a network by faking server requests; 156 “Zoom-bombing” incidents, where an unauthorized person intrudes on a video call; and more than 110 phishing attacks, where a deceptive message tricks a user to let a hacker into their network.

Georgia DA wants security help in Trump investigation

Associated Press

ATLANTA — The prosecutor who's investigating whether Donald Trump and others broke the law by trying to pressure Georgia officials to overturn Joe Biden's presidential election victory is asking the FBI for security help after the former president railed against prosecutors investigating him.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis on Sunday wrote a letter to the FBI office in Atlanta asking for a risk assessment of the county courthouse and government center. She also asked the FBI to provide protective resources, “to include intelligence and federal agents.”

Willis last year opened an investigation into any potential attempts to improperly influence the 2020 general election in Georgia by Trump and his associates. A special grand jury is set to be seated May 2 to aid in that investigation, and Willis asked the FBI to take the steps she requested well in advance of that date.

“My staff and I will not be influenced or intimidated by anyone as this investigation moves forward,” Willis wrote.

She added that her office has already taken steps to address security concerns “considering the communications we have received from persons unhappy with our commitment to fulfill our duties.” She said she's also working with county officials on the need for extra security measures as the investigation progresses.

But she said security concerns were “escalated” over the weekend as Trump lashed out at prosecutors looking into his actions, calling them “vicious, horrible people.”

“If these radical, vicious, racist prosecutors do anything wrong or illegal, I hope we are going to have in this country the biggest protest we have ever had in Washington, D.C., in New York, in Atlanta and elsewhere,” Trump said during the Saturday night rally in Texas.

US, Russia clash sharply on Ukraine during UN meeting

The Washington Post

Russia angrily denounced the United States on Monday for “whipping up hysteria” over Ukraine, saying it had brought “pure Nazis” to power on Russia’s border and wanted to make “heroes out of those peoples who fought on the side of Hitler.”

In a blistering attack at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council, Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said the U.S. itself was “provoking escalation” of the situation by falsely charging Moscow with preparing to invade Ukraine.

“You’re waiting for it to happen, as if you want your words to become a reality,” Nebenzya said in remarks directed toward U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

The confrontation was one of the sharpest in years in the international forum. Nebenzya’s comments followed a charge by Thomas-Greenfield that Russia was “attempting, without any factual basis, to paint Ukraine and Western countries as the aggressors to fabricate a pretext for attack” by more than 100,000 heavily armed troops it has amassed on Ukraine’s border.

Russia, which has demanded a Western commitment to exclude Ukraine from its security umbrella, “has threatened to take

military action should its demands not be met,” Thomas-Greenfield said. “If Russia further invades Ukraine, none of us will be able to say we didn’t see it coming. And the consequences will be horrific, which is why this meeting is so important today.”

With the support of only China, the Russians forced a vote at the beginning of the U.S.-called meeting on whether to hold the session behind closed doors. Calling for the continuation of diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis, Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jun said that “what we urgently need now is quiet diplomacy, but not microphone diplomacy.”

But the majority of the 15-member council voted to proceed with the public session, which President Joe Biden, in a statement issued by the White House, called “a critical step in rallying the world to speak out in one voice.”

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is expected to speak with Russian President Vladimir Putin later Monday, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will speak again this week, a senior State Department official said, after earlier efforts by the top diplomats to reach a resolution were unsuccessful.

British PM sorry after ‘partygate’ papers released

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Boris Johnson apologized Monday for lockdown-flouting parties in Downing Street — but insisted that he and his government can be trusted.

Johnson told lawmakers in the House of Commons that he would make changes to the way the government is run in the wake of the “partygate” scandal.

He said: “I get it and I will fix it.”

He spoke after senior civil servant Sue Gray found that gatherings by the prime minister and his staff represent a “serious failure” to observe the standards expected of government.

Gray published findings on four gatherings in 2020 and 2021, and police are investigating a further dozen events.

“Against the backdrop of the pandemic, when the government was asking citizens to accept far-reaching restrictions on their lives, some of the behavior surrounding these gatherings is difficult to justify,” Gray said.

Gray’s glimpse inside 10 Downing St. marked by excessive alcohol consumption and staff afraid to speak out about workplace problems are a blow to Johnson — who has previously said the rules were followed at all times — and come despite the fact that Gray’s conclusions relate to just four of the 16 events she investigated.

Her findings on 12 other events in 2020 and 2021 have been withheld at the request of the police, who have launched a criminal investigation into the most serious alleged breaches of coronavirus rules. The cuts have led opponents to accuse Johnson of a whitewash.

Allegations that the prime minister and his staff flouted restrictions imposed on the country to curb the spread of the coronavirus have caused public anger, led some Conservative lawmakers to call for Johnson’s resignation and triggered intense infighting inside the governing party.

Johnson has denied personal wrongdoing and said he has “absolutely no intention” of resigning.

It’s unclear whether Gray’s full findings will be published once the police investigation is finished. Johnson’s spokesman, Max Blain, said the prime minister’s office would discuss with police and Gray’s team “what is suitable” to publish.

UAE intercepted ballistic missile from Yemen as Israeli leader visits

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates—The United Arab Emirates intercepted a ballistic missile fired by Yemen’s Houthi rebels early Monday as the Israeli president, Isaac Herzog, was visiting the country, authorities said, the third such attack in as many weeks.

The attack only fuels ongoing tensions in the wider Persian Gulf, which has seen a series of attacks as Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers unravels and Yemen’s yearslong war rages on.

As negotiators in Vienna now attempt to revive the accord and Emirati-backed forces press on the Iran-backed Houthis, the rebels are launching their longest-range attacks yet — a major challenge for the Emirates.

The UAE’s state-run WAM news agency reported Monday’s interception, saying “the at-

tack did not result in any losses, as the remnants of the ballistic missile fell outside the populated areas.”

Houthi military spokesman Yehia Sarei gave a press conference later Monday, claiming that the rebels had targeted “sensitive sites” in Abu Dhabi and Dubai with both Zulfikar ballistic missiles and drones, without offering evidence for his assertions.

Herzog, Israel’s largely ceremonial president, was in the UAE on Monday for the first official visit by an Israeli head of state to the Gulf Arab nation. The day before, he held extensive talks with Abu Dhabi’s powerful Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in the capital, where he stressed Israel’s support for the UAE’s “security requirements” and condemned the recent attacks.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman stole lottery tickets after clerk shot

GA WARNER ROBINS — Sheriff's deputies in middle Georgia have arrested a woman they said stole lottery tickets after others shot and mortally wounded a clerk.

Houston County Sheriff's Capt. Jon Holland said Friday that deputies arrested 43-year-old Lakiesha Deshawn McGhee, of Bonaire, on Monday after finding evidence that McGhee stole lottery tickets from the same office at the Warner Robins business where clerk Sabrina Renee Dollar lay dying. Holland said deputies also believe McGhee briefly disconnected power from the building's security system before emergency workers arrived.

McGhee is charged with theft by taking and tampering with evidence and remains jailed.

Holland did not accuse McGhee of being involved in the shooting of Dollar, saying McGhee called 911 after three unknown men entered the business just after midnight on Jan. 18.

Carbon monoxide at hotel puts 9 in hospital

OH MARYSVILLE — Seven people were hospitalized in critical condition Saturday after suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning at a Hampton Inn in Ohio, local officials said.

A total of nine people were taken to local hospitals, according to The Columbus Dispatch. Marysville Fire Chief Jay Riley told the newspaper that the source of the carbon monoxide was unclear, but everyone who

was hospitalized had been in the hotel's pool area.

Riley said the victims included both children and adults. He did not provide exact ages.

Authorities said they received a 911 call Saturday evening about a 2-year-old girl who had either fallen into the pool or was found in the pool unconscious at the Hampton Inn in Marysville. More 911 calls soon followed about unconscious people or others who reported symptoms such as dizziness and a burning in the throat, Marysville Police Chief Tony Brooks said.

The hotel was evacuated shortly after.

Teen runaways flee cops and crash stolen car

AZ BULLHEAD CITY — A stolen car carrying five teenagers who ran away from a Las Vegas group home crashed while being chased by Arizona state troopers Thursday night, seriously injuring one girl and leaving all facing charges, authorities said.

Three girls and two boys, aged 15 and 16 years old, were in the stolen Volkswagen sedan, according to the Bullhead City Police Department. They were traveling west on Arizona State Route 68 at high speed when the driver ran a red light, lost control and collided with four other vehicles.

The girl driving the car tried to run away but was quickly caught, Bullhead City police spokeswoman Emily Fromelt said. One girl in the car had to be airlifted to a Las Vegas hospital for treatment, although her injuries aren't life-threatening.

The other three passengers were treated for minor injuries

at a local hospital. One person in the vehicles that were struck at the Laughlin bridge had minor injuries.

Judge won't curb federal wild horse capture effort

NV RENO — A federal judge decided Friday not to rein in the roundup and capture of wild horses in eastern Nevada, rejecting advocates' claims the federal government was "needlessly and recklessly" killing free-roaming mustangs in violation of U.S. law.

With a little more than four weeks to go for federal land managers to complete what they call a drought-prompted "gather" near the Utah state line, U.S. District Judge Miranda Du said she wasn't convinced groups trying to stop the process would win their underlying lawsuit.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management insists it must round up the mustangs before the end of February — one of several operations scheduled on an expedited basis due to historically dry conditions on the Western range.

Horse advocates have said the agency is squeezing the roundup of 2,030 horses in Nevada into a month under an illegal environmental assessment of a series of gathers over 10 years.

Undercover operation yields 30-plus arrests

NC WHITEVILLE — More than 30 people were arrested on over 200 cumulative counts related to an investigation into illegal drug, alcohol and firearms sales in a southeastern North Carolina

county, the state Division of Alcohol Law Enforcement announced Saturday.

The monthslong undercover operation in Columbus County reached a climax Friday when local, state and federal law enforcement officials attempted to serve arrest warrants and a residential search warrant, according to an ALE news release. Agents seized drugs such as fentanyl, methamphetamine and cocaine, as well as guns and alcoholic beverages. Nearly a dozen of those who were the subject of arrest warrants are still at large, the release said.

The operation focused on businesses licensed through Alcoholic Beverage Control rules and on residences.

Mars Wrigley will close old chocolate factory

IL CHICAGO — Mars Wrigley is closing a chocolate factory on Chicago's West Side and plans to donate the building hailed for its Spanish-style architecture.

The company said the plant built in 1928 will be phased out during the next two years and the 280 workers there will be "encouraged to explore the opportunities to apply for open roles across our network, specifically in the Chicago area."

The Chicago Tribune reported that the factory was built on 16 acres in a residential area that once was part of a golf club. The company statement said it plans to donate the property "for the use of the community."

Mars acquired Chicago-based Wrigley in 2008 and moved its global headquarters to New Jersey in 2017.

— From wire reports

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Bengals headed to 1st Super Bowl in 33 years

Associated Press

These aren't the same ol' Bungles. Not even close.

Joe Burrow and these young, hungry Cincinnati Bengals are Super Bowl-bound as unexpected and tenacious AFC champions.

Evan McPherson kicked a 31-yard field goal with 9:22 left in overtime after Burrow kept his cool leading a furious second-half comeback. They got the Bengals to the NFL's big game for the first time in 33 years with a 27-24 victory over the Kansas City Chiefs for the AFC championship Sunday.

"It's a special team that's capable of doing special things," said Cincinnati coach Zac Taylor, who was in elementary school the last time the Bengals went to the Super Bowl.

"We've said that from the get-go, whether people believed us or not," he added. "We believed. So we're not surprised."

And who could blame them?

The team erased an 18-point deficit on the road — tying an AFC title game record for largest comeback — to take a late 24-21 lead on McPherson's 52-yarder.

"I'd say nobody blinked an eye," the rookie kicker said of the Bengals falling behind big early. "I think we all thought we were going to come back and win the game."

But Harrison Butker's 44-yard kick as time expired in regulation sent it to overtime a week after his 49-yarder on the final play of regulation did the same against Buffalo.

And after the Bills' Josh Allen called tails and it came up heads for the overtime coin toss in that one — giving Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs the ball to seal a wild 42-26 victory — Cincinnati backup quarterback Brandon Allen called heads and the coin came up tails.

Kansas City opened overtime again with the ball, but Vonn Bell intercepted Mahomes on the third play, and Burrow and the Bengals took over.

And now they're heading to the Super Bowl for the first time since 1989 after winning their first playoff overtime game.

"Usually when you lose the coin flip to those guys, you're going home," said Burrow, Cincinnati's second-year quarterback. "Our defense really stepped up and made plays in the second half. And on offense we made plays when we had to. I thought the offensive line played really well all day. We started running the ball there at the end and that's exciting."

"Big win for us."

The Bengals (13-7) will play the Los An-

geles Rams (15-5) in the Super Bowl at the Rams' home stadium on Feb. 13. Cincinnati lost to the 49ers in both of its previous trips to the Super Bowl.

Mahomes and the Chiefs (14-6) will be left to lament blowing a chance at a third straight Super Bowl appearance.

"When you're up 21-3 at any point in the game, you can't lose it," Mahomes said. "I put that on myself."

Kansas City had a chance at a winning touchdown in the closing seconds of regulation, but sacks by Sam Hubbard on consecutive plays forced the Chiefs to settle for the tying field goal.

"We're going to the Super Bowl," Hubbard said. "It sounds crazy to say that."

Cincinnati has won six of its last seven games against Kansas City, including two this season. But it didn't look good for the Bengals early in this one.

The Chiefs got a touchdown on their first three possessions, with Mahomes finding Mecole Hardman for a 3-yard score that made it 21-3 — and had this one looking very much like a rout. Mahomes joined Tom Brady (2014), Joe Flacco (2012) and Aaron Rodgers (2010) as the only players with three games with three or more TD passes in a single postseason.

Rams rally past Niners for Super Bowl berth

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — After Matthew Stafford's wife leaped into his arms, he took a moment to soak it all in — this victory, this confetti-strewn field, this remarkable year of his life.

One year to the day after the quarterback agreed to join the star-studded Los Angeles Rams for a shot at a ring, their chances were dimming rapidly when they headed into the fourth quarter of the NFC championship game down by double digits to the mighty San Francisco 49ers.

But with three gritty scoring drives followed by a cathartic defensive stand, the Rams secured the right to stay home for the Super Bowl — and Stafford shone the brightest in this impressive constellation.

Travin Howard made a game-sealing interception with 1:09 to

play, and Los Angeles roared back in the fourth quarter to secure a spot in the Super Bowl at its home stadium next month with a thrilling 20-17 victory Sunday night.

"You can't write the story any better," Stafford said. "I'm at a loss for words. I'm just having a blast playing ball with these guys and, shoot, we've got one more at the home stadium. Let's get it done."

The Rams will welcome the Cincinnati Bengals in two weeks for Super Bowl 56 in owner Stan Kroenke's multibillion-dollar SoFi Stadium.

Stafford passed for 337 yards and hit Cooper Kupp with two touchdown passes for Los Angeles (15-5), which began the fourth quarter down 17-7. But after Kupp's second TD catch and a tying field goal on a drive ex-

tended by Jaquiski Tartt's brutal dropped interception, the Rams drove for Matt Gay's go-ahead, 30-yard field goal with 1:46 to play.

Los Angeles' defense then won it when Aaron Donald got hold of Jimmy Garoppolo and forced him to fling a pass toward JaMychal Hasty. The ball caromed high in the air off Hasty's hands and came straight down to Howard — and it was secured by the fourth-year pro who only recently got a prominent role on the team's defense.

"I've got total trust and confidence in that defense, man," said Stafford, the 13-year veteran who never won a playoff game before this month. "They've been unbelievable all year. Way to freakin' ice the game. I loved it."

Kupp finished with 11 catches

for 142 yards in his latest spectacular game, while Odell Beckham Jr. punched his ticket to his first Super Bowl with another strong performance by the team's midseason acquisition, making nine catches for 113 yards.

"The story could not be written any better for us to play them in the NFC championship and then shut the door," Beckham said of the 49ers.

The Rams won their second conference title in the past four years under coach Sean McVay and moved one step from the franchise's second championship in the Super Bowl era.

Los Angeles snapped a six-game losing streak against its archrival, which secured its playoff berth with an overtime comeback victory in Inglewood just three weeks ago.

Young scores 36, Hawks rally past Lakers

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Trae Young scored 36 points and the Atlanta Hawks beat the Los Angeles Lakers 129-121 on Sunday for their seventh straight win.

Young also had 12 assists. John Collins added 20 points with 11 rebounds, and Clint Capela scored 15 points.

Malik Monk led the Lakers with 33 points in the Lakers' third consecutive loss, all without LeBron James. James was not with the team due to continued swelling in his left knee. He returned to Los Angeles for treatment.

"If our mindset is right we get stops on the defensive end... I think we have a good chance of winning any night," Young said.

Onyeka Okongwu scored 12 of his 16 points in the final period, when he helped hold Anthony Davis to five of his 27 points.

"We're not in the position we want to be right now but that's OK," said Russell Westbrook, who had 20 points and 12 assists. "We know what we need to do as a team. Just find a way to get over the hump and close games out."

Suns 112, Spurs 110: NBA-leading Phoenix became the first team in the league with 40 wins — against only nine losses. The home victory also assured that coach Monty Williams and the rest of the coaching staff will lead Team LeBron in the All-Star Game next month.

Devin Booker scored 28 points and Mikal Bridges added a season-high 26 as the Suns overcame a 12-point deficit in the fourth quarter to win their 10th straight game.

Booker hit back-to-back three-pointers late in the fourth to turn a two-point deficit into a 112-108 lead with 1:18 left against San Antonio. He finished 12 of 24 from the field, going 4 of 9 from three-point range.

Nuggets 136, Bucks 100: Nikola Jokic had 18 points, 15 assists and nine rebounds to help Denver roll to a win at Milwaukee.

The reigning NBA MVP just missed his 13th triple-double of the season. He matched his season high for assists.

Aaron Gordon scored 24 points, Monte Morris had 18 and Will Barton 15 for the Nuggets. They improved to 4-0 on a six-game trip and matched their longest winning streak of the season. Denver has won six of the last seven and 13 of the last 19 road games against the Bucks.

Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 22 of his 29 points in the first half. He was the MVP in consecutive seasons before Jokic earned that honor last season.

Timberwolves 126, Jazz 106: Karl-Anthony Towns had 31 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists, Jaden McDaniels scored a season-high 22 points off the bench and host Minnesota routed short-handed Utah.

Towns scored 16 straight points as the Wolves pushed a four-point halftime lead to 17 entering the fourth quarter.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 23 for the Jazz, who have lost five straight.

Playing without Donovan Mitchell (concussion) and Rudy Gobert (left calf strain), Utah suffered another setback when forward Joe Ingles exited the game in the second quar-

ter with a left knee injury.

Bulls 130, Trail Blazers 116: Nikola Vucevic had 24 points and 14 rebounds, DeMar DeRozan added 23 points and 10 assists and host Chicago overcame a slow start to beat Portland.

Zach LaVine had 20 points, and Ayo Dosunmu finished with 11 assists. The Bulls have won three of four to improve to 31-18.

C.J. McCollum had 29 points for the Trail Blazers. Norman Powell added 22, and Anfernee Simons had 21.

Clippers 115, Hornets 90: Reggie Jackson and Brandon Boston Jr. each scored 19 points, helping Los Angeles win at Charlotte.

Marcus Morris Sr. scored 16 points for the Clippers. They improved to 4-3 on an eight-game trip.

Pistons 115, Cavaliers 105: Saddiq Bey scored 31 points, Cade Cunningham had 19 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists and host Detroit overcame a terrible start to beat Cleveland.

After the Cavs raced to a 15-0 lead, the Pistons cut it to 55-49 at halftime, and finally took their first lead in the fourth quarter. Cunningham finished with the triple-double after failing to score in the first half.

Magic 110, Mavericks 108: Franz Wagner scored 18 points, including the tiebreaking layup with 54 seconds remaining, and host Orlando overcame Luka Doncic's seventh triple-double of the season to beat Dallas.

Chuma Okeke scored 19 points and helped the NBA-worst Magic win consecutive games for the second time this season.

Ivey's late 3 lifts No. 6 Purdue over No. 16 Ohio State

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — Jaden Ivey hit a tiebreaking three-pointer with 0.6 seconds left and No. 6 Purdue fended off a late charge from No. 16 Ohio State for an 81-78 victory Sunday.

The Boilermakers led by 52-32 with 14:35 left in the game, but the Buckeyes methodically fought their way back and finally tied it at 78 on E.J. Liddell's three with 25.3 seconds to go.

After a timeout, Ivey freed himself up for the winning shot — right in front of the Purdue bench. Ivey finished with 21 points and Zach Edey added 20

for the Boilermakers (18-3, 7-3 Big Ten), who have won three straight and six of seven.

Liddell and Malaki Branham each scored 20 points to lead Ohio State (13-5, 6-3), which has lost five times in its last six trips to Mackey Arena. Ohio State had won three straight overall.

No. 11 Wisconsin 66, Minnesota 60: Johnny Davis had 16 points and a career-high 15 rebounds and took over the game in the final minutes for the host Badgers.

Wisconsin (17-3, 8-2 Big Ten) earned its ninth win in its last 10 games to tie Illinois (15-5, 8-2) for the Big Ten lead, with No. 10

Michigan State (16-4, 7-2) just a half-game behind. Wisconsin visits Illinois on Wednesday.

The Badgers improved to 10-1 in games decided by six points or fewer.

The Golden Gophers (11-7, 2-7) trailed by nine early in the second half but rallied to tie the game at 60-all on a pair of E.J. Stephens free throws with 2:23 left.

No. 17 Providence 65, No. 22 Marquette 63: Nate Watson was fouled on a dunk and completed the three-point play in the final minute for the host Friars.

Watson finished with 17

points and six rebounds. Justin Minaya had 14 points and Noah Horchler finished with 11 points and 10 rebounds.

It was the fifth straight victory for Providence (18-2, 8-1 Big East), which improved to 13-0 at home this season. The Friars also avenged an 88-56 loss at Marquette on Jan. 4.

The Golden Eagles (15-7, 7-4) had won seven straight.

Trailing by a basket with 14 seconds remaining, Marquette had a chance to tie, but Tyler Kolek came up short on his jumper and a putback layup by Justin Lewis trickled off the rim.

Avs top Sabres for 10th straight win

Associated Press

DENVER — Mikko Rantanen had a goal and an assist and the Colorado Avalanche beat the Buffalo Sabres 4-1 Sunday night for their 10th straight win.

Nazem Kadri and Gabriel Landeskog also scored for Colorado, which tied the second-longest win streak in franchise history and matched Pittsburgh for the longest in the NHL this season.

Valeri Nichushkin added an empty-netter with 1:03 left to play and Darcy Kuemper had 30 saves as the Avalanche got their 18th straight home win.

"I've learned that we're a resilient group, pretty consistent," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said. "There were some games where we weren't perfect, but we've found different ways to win with different guys chipping in, which good teams do. It's been an amazing month from our guys."

The Avalanche's home winning streak is the fifth longest in NHL history. Detroit has the longest, taking 23 in a row from Nov. 5, 2011 to Feb. 19, 2012.

"It's fun winning for sure," Kadri said. "It's pretty exceptional when you look at the history of the Avs; they've had some pretty good teams, so we're humbled by that. That being said, I think it's not (having) too many complacent guys in the dressing room. I feel like

everyone feels that we can still be a little bit better. We're finding our game. Obviously, momentum is a huge key and we hope to continue that."

Kings 4, Penguins 3: Trevor Moore broke a third-period tie with his second goal of the game in visiting Los Angeles' win over Pittsburgh.

Moore took a lead pass from Blake Lizotte and beat goalie Tristan Jarry on a breakaway with 6:39 left.

Drew Doughty and Alex Iafallo also scored for the Kings.

Sidney Crosby scored his 498th career goal for the Penguins.

Wild 4, Islanders 3: Kirill Kaprizov, Joel Eriksson Ek and Matt Boldy each had a goal and an assist, and visiting Minnesota beat New York for its fifth straight win.

Brandon Duhame also scored and Matt Dumba had two assists to help the Wild earn at least a point for the ninth straight game.

Brock Nelson, Ross Johnston and Oliver Wahlstrom scored for the Islanders, who have lost two straight and three of four. Ilya Sorokin finished with 17 saves.

Hurricanes 2, Sharks 1: Andrei Svechnikov scored on a rebound with 3:44 remaining in the game to lift host Carolina over San Jose.

Vincent Trocheck scored the first goal for the Hurricanes, who've won four straight

games and seven of their past eight entering the All-Star break.

Rudolf Balcers scored early in the third period for the Sharks, who are in a 1-3-1 stretch that matches the team's worst five-game span of the season.

Stars 6, Bruins 1: Tyler Seguin had two goals and an assist, Jamie Benn had a goal and two assists, and host Dallas beat Boston.

Alexander Radulov, Luke Glendening and Roope Hintz also scored for the Stars, who have won five of their past six. Jake Oettinger stopped 28 shots.

Craig Smith scored at 5:49 of the third to end Dallas' bid for its first shutout this season.

Blue Jackets 6, Canadiens 3: Patrik Laine scored twice and Joonas Korpisalo made 32 saves in visiting Columbus' win over NHL-worst Montreal.

Jack Roslovic, Eric Robinson, Yegor Chinnakhov and Cole Sillinger added goals for the Blue Jackets, who recorded back-to-back wins for the first time since Nov. 26.

Rangers 3, Kraken 2: Defenseman K'Andre Miller scored with 34 seconds left and Igor Shesterkin made 40 saves to help host New York beat Seattle.

Mika Zibanejad had a goal and two assists, and Alexis Lafreniere also scored for the Rangers.

US men's soccer stumbles in 2-0 loss at Canada

Associated Press

HAMILTON, Ontario — Canada established itself as the dominant nation in soccer's North and Central American and Caribbean region, taking a big step toward reaching the World Cup for the first time since 1986 with a 2-0 victory on Sunday over the United States.

Cyle Larin scored in the seventh minute and Sam Adekugbe added a goal in the fifth minute of second-half stoppage time. Canada beat the U.S. for just the second time in 37 years, remaining unbeaten in qualifying through 10 of 14 games.

Included are a win and a draw against both the U.S. and Mexico, traditionally the region's dominant nations.

"I genuinely believe that these

men have an opportunity to really leave a proper football legacy on this country moving forward," Canada coach John Herdman said.

The U.S. has one win and two draws in five road qualifiers but remains on track to return to the World Cup for the first time since 2014 with wins in its remaining two home games, the first a chilly encounter with Honduras on Wednesday night in what is forecast to be a single-digit or sub-zero temperature at St. Paul, Minn.

"Our focus right now is finishing off the window with a win," U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said. "If we can do that, we'll be in good position."

Canada defeated the U.S. in qualifying for the first time since

1980 and leads North and Central America and the Caribbean with 22 points. The U.S. remained second with 18 points, ahead of Mexico on goal difference, followed by Panama (17), Costa Rica (13), and El Salvador (nine).

The top three nations qualify for this year's tournament in Qatar, and fourth place advances to a playoff against the Oceania champion, likely New Zealand.

On sunny but breezy 22-degree day, central defenders Miles Robinson and Chris Richards were the only American starters in short sleeves and just two of Canada's players wore long sleeves: Jonathan David and Steven Vitória. Canada keeper Milan Borjan wore long pants, while American goal-

keeper Matt Turner wore shorts.

Berhalter inserted Gyasi Zardes at forward in place of Jesús Ferreira.

Canada went ahead after Turner's goal kick failed to reach midfield. Kamal Miller headed the ball back toward goal, and Jonathan Osorio touched ahead to Larin.

Larin exchanged passes with David, then beat Turner to the far post with a right-footed shot from 14 yards for his Canadian record 23rd international goal, one more than Dwayne De Rosario.

Berhalter said Turner might have mis-hit the ball.

"The wind killed the ball flight... On a smaller field, smaller mistakes make bigger differences," Turner said through the U.S. Soccer Federation.