

US, Britain launch strikes on Houthis

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. and British militaries bombed multiple targets in eight locations used by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen on Monday night, the second time the two allies have conducted coordinated retaliatory strikes on an array of the rebels' missile-launching capabilities.

According to officials, the U.S. and U.K. used warship- and submarine-launched Tomahawk missiles and fighter jets to take out Houthi missile storage sites, drones and launchers. The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a military operation, said Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands contributed to the mission, including with intelligence and surveillance.

In a joint statement, the six allied nations said the strikes specifically targeted a Houthi underground storage site and loca-

tions associated with the Houthis' missile and air surveillance capabilities. They added, "Our aim remains to de-escalate tensions and restore stability in the Red Sea, but let us reiterate our warning to Houthi leadership: we will not hesitate to defend lives and the free flow of commerce in one of the world's most critical waterways in the face of continued threats."

Britain's Ministry of Defense confirmed that four Royal Air Force Typhoon jets struck "multiple targets at two military sites in the vicinity of Sanaa airfield" with precision-guided bombs. The strikes, said Defense Secretary Grant Shapps, were "aimed at degrading Houthi capabilities" and would "deal another blow to their limited stockpiles and ability to threaten global trade."

One senior U.S. military official told reporters the strikes dropped between 25 and 30 mu-

nitions and hit multiple targets in each location, adding that the U.S. "observed good impacts and effects" at all sites, including the destruction of more advanced weapons in the underground storage facility. The official said this is the first time such advanced weapons were targeted.

The official also said fighter jets from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower aircraft carrier conducted strikes, and other ships involved included the USS Gravelly and USS Mason, both naval destroyers, and the USS Philippine Sea, a cruiser.

The joint operation comes about 10 days after U.S. and British warships and fighter jets struck more than 60 targets in 28 locations. That was the first U.S. military response to what has been a persistent campaign of Houthi drone and missile attacks on commercial ships since the start of the Israel-Hamas

war in October.

The Houthis' media office said in an online statement Monday that raids targeted Sanaa, Yemen's capital. And Jamal Hassan, a resident from south Sanaa, told The Associated Press that two strikes landed near his home, setting off car alarms in the street. An Associated Press journalist in Sanaa also heard aircraft flying above the skies of Sanaa overnight Monday.

Al-Masirah, a Houthi-run satellite news channel, said there were raids on three areas of Sanaa: al-Dailami Air Base just north of the capital; Sarif, northeast of the city center; and al-Hafa, which is south of Sanaa.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke with President Joe Biden earlier Monday. Sunak's office said the two leaders agreed to take "as needed, targeted military action to degrade Houthi capabilities."

Navy splitting major commands in Europe and Africa

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and 6th Fleet are separating after 19 years as a single command, a move that comes as the service adapts to growing demands that include missile defense in the Baltics and carrier operations in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The change creates two distinct staffs and realigns each command's organizational chart with the service's traditional structure, Capt. Clayton Doss, a spokesman for NAVEUR-AF and 6th Fleet, said Tuesday in a statement following a Stars and Stripes query.

The decision was made to "better posture for day-to-day operations and future crises," said Doss, who noted both staffs would continue to work together as changes are made.

It wasn't immediately clear how far NAVEUR-AF and 6th Fleet were in the separation process, which streamlines the chain of command and clarifies focus areas for working groups and departments.

The statement did not discuss how commanding or supervisory openings created by the split would be filled.

But some of those changes, underway since late last year, are already visible at Naval Sup-

port Activity Naples, where the commands are headquartered. Signs at the base were altered last month to reflect separate positions for some assignments previously held by a single commanding officer.

The war in Ukraine, Russian threats in the Baltic Sea and the effects of the Israel-Hamas war in the Eastern Mediterranean have brought greater focus on the European theater than at any time since the Cold War.

More U.S. ships, aircraft and tens of thousands of additional personnel have arrived in Europe during the past two years.

The commands also partner with African nations to combat

extremist militants and protect sea lanes.

The Navy has kept a nearly continuous aircraft carrier strike group or amphibious assault group presence in the NAVEUR-AF/6th Fleet area of responsibility for the last two years.

The addition of Finland to NATO and the pending accession of Sweden also have increased naval operations in the north.

Meanwhile, there are now four Navy destroyers homeported at Naval Station Rota in Spain. A fifth destroyer, USS Oscar Austin, will join them in the late summer.

Navy eyes drone boats for launching missiles

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy's drone boats in the Middle East are moving out of testing and into combat-ready roles under a new unit based in Bahrain.

Experimental unmanned surface vessels operated by the service's Task Group 59.1 could be used to launch missiles at enemy targets and to guide special operations teams, among other operations, said Navy Lt. Luis Echeverria, the unit commander.

Echeverria took charge of the unit, which includes civilian contractors and seven sailors, on Jan. 3 at Naval Support Activity Bahrain, the headquarters of the 5th Fleet.

Middle Eastern waters have become battlegrounds in recent months as Houthi militants in Yemen have fired missiles at commercial shipping. In re-

sponse, the Navy has shot down drone swarms and launched strikes to take out Houthi weapons stocks.

The unit's formation was in the works long before recent tensions in the Middle East, Echeverria said, adding that it assisted a counter-mine task force during its first exercise.

The October exercise Digital Talon 2 offered another example of the type of work that the unit will undertake, Echeverria said.

In that exercise, an unmanned speedboat launched Switchblade missiles with the help of other naval drones to destroy a target boat off the Arabian Peninsula. A sailor at an operations center in Bahrain fired the missiles, and Special Operations Command Central also took part, a Navy statement said.

Interdictions in which un-

manned drones guide Navy SEALs to drug and weapons smugglers also will be part of the duties, Echeverria said. Such missions are among the most dangerous on the high seas.

Two Navy SEALs who fell into the Arabian Sea during an interdiction mission Jan. 11 were declared dead Monday. The interdiction seized missile parts that the U.S. Navy says were made in Iran for use by Houthi militants.

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, 5th fleet commander, didn't directly say the fleet's drones participated in that interdiction but didn't rule it out during an Associated Press interview Monday.

"They are specifically designed to conduct interdiction operations," he said. Cooper added: "There's no squeaking anything by it."

A statement Tuesday from 5th Fleet declined to comment on Task Group 59.1's involvement in specific operations.

Task Force 59, the Navy unit that has tested commercial drones in exercises, isn't involved in operations defending ships in the Red Sea or against Houthi positions in Yemen, U.S. 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Rick Chernitzer said Tuesday.

Using naval drones in missions is the logical next step for the Navy, said P.W. Singer, a political scientist whose works on drone warfare have been cited extensively by military officials.

"The earlier exercises were originally meant as learning experiments, which are incredibly valuable," Singer said. "Now, the fleet can start to apply those lessons, and, in turn, learn even more by doing even more."

Navy IDs SEALs lost during Arabian Sea raid

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

Christopher Chambers and Nathan Gage Ingram were the Navy SEALs who went missing in rough seas during a nighttime ship-boarding mission in the Arabian Sea, the service said Monday.

"Chris and Gage selflessly served their country with unwavering professionalism and exceptional capabilities," Capt. Blake L. Chaney, commander of the Naval Special Warfare Group 1, said in a statement. "This loss is devastating for NSW, our families, the special operations community, and across the nation."

During the Jan. 11 mission off the coast of Somalia that resulted in the seizure of Iranian-made missile parts bound for militants in Yemen, the two sail-

ors went missing overboard.

Commandos launched from the USS Lewis B. Puller, a mobile sea base, backed up by drones and helicopters. They loaded onto small special operations combat craft driven by naval special warfare crew to get to the boat. It was the type of boarding for which SEALs train routinely, The Associated Press reported.

Ingram began climbing the ladder onto the boat, he slipped into a gap the waves had created between the vessel and the SEALs' combatant craft. As he went under, Chambers jumped into the gap to try to save him.

Rescue crews searched for 10 days before U.S. Central Command announced Sunday that they were now declared dead. The Navy on Monday identified Chambers and Ingram as the

two SEALs.

Chambers, 37, was a Navy special warfare operator first class from Maryland who enlisted in the Navy in 2012 and graduated from SEAL training in 2014. His awards include the Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medal with Combat "C" and three Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medals.

Ingram, 27, was a Navy special warfare operator second class from Texas who enlisted in 2019 and graduated from SEAL training in 2021.

The Navy's 5th Fleet is investigating. That probe is expected to examine whether the SEALs were properly equipped and trained for the mission, whether procedures were followed, and any decisions regarding the timing and approval of the raid, including the weather and the

state of the seas.

The seizure came as the interdiction of weapons to Yemen takes on new urgency. The Yemen-based Houthi rebels have been conducting a campaign of missile and drone attacks against commercial and Navy ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden over Israel's war on Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. U.S. retaliatory strikes have so far not deterred their assaults.

President Joe Biden released a statement mourning the loss of Chambers and Ingram.

"These SEALs represented the very best of our country, pledging their lives to protect their fellow Americans. Our hearts go out to the family members, loved ones, friends, and shipmates who are grieving for these two brave Americans," Biden said.

AI robocall that mimics Biden is denounced

Associated Press

The New Hampshire attorney general's office on Monday said it was investigating reports of an apparent robocall that used artificial intelligence to mimic President Joe Biden's voice and discourage voters in the state from coming to the polls during Tuesday's primary election. Attorney General John Formella said the recorded message, which was sent to multiple voters on Sunday, appears to be an illegal attempt to disrupt and suppress voting. He said voters "should disregard the contents of this message entirely."

A recording of the call reviewed by The Associated Press generates a voice similar to Biden's and employs his often-

used phrase, "What a bunch of malarkey." It then tells the listener to "save your vote for the November election."

"Voting this Tuesday only enables the Republicans in their quest to elect Donald Trump again," the voice mimicking Biden says. "Your vote makes a difference in November, not this Tuesday."

It is not true that voting in Tuesday's primary precludes voters from casting a ballot in November's general election. Biden is not campaigning in New Hampshire and his name will not appear on Tuesday's primary ballot after he elevated South Carolina to the lead-off position for the Democratic primaries, but his allies are running a write-

in campaign for him in the state.

It's not known who is behind the calls, though they falsely showed up to recipients as coming from the personal cellphone number of Kathy Sullivan, a former state Democratic Party chair who helps run Granite for America, a super-PAC supporting the Biden write-in campaign.

Sullivan said she alerted law enforcement and issued a complaint to the attorney general after multiple voters in the state reported receiving the call Sunday night.

"This call links back to my personal cellphone number without my permission," she said in a statement. "It is outright election interference, and clearly an attempt to harass me and other

New Hampshire voters who are planning to write-in Joe Biden on Tuesday."

It was unclear how many people received the call but a spokesperson for Sullivan said she heard from at least a dozen people who received it. The attorney general's office encouraged anyone who has received the call to email the state Justice Department's election law unit.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre confirmed Monday that the call "was indeed fake and not recorded by the president." Biden's campaign manager, Julie Chavez Rodriguez, said that the campaign is "actively discussing additional actions to take immediately."

High court allows agents to cut border razor wire

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A divided Supreme Court on Monday allowed Border Patrol agents to resume cutting for now razor wire that Texas installed along a stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border that is at the center of an escalating standoff between the Biden administration and the state over immigration enforcement.

The 5-4 vote clears the way for Border Patrol agents to cut or clear out concertina wire that Texas has put along the banks of the Rio Grande to deter migrants from entering the U.S. illegally. Some migrants have been injured by the sharp wire and the Justice Department has argued the barrier impedes the U.S. government's ability to patrol the border, including coming to the aid of migrants in need of help.

None of the justices provided any explanation for their vote. The one-page order is a victory for the Biden administration while the lawsuit over the wire continues.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott had

authorized the wire, one of a series of aggressive measures the Republican has taken on the border in the name of curbing illegal crossings from Mexico. His spokesman said the absence of razor wire and other deterrents encourages migrants to risk unsafe crossings and makes the job of Texas border personnel harder.

The White House applauded the order, which was handed down after a federal appeals court last month had forced federal agents to stop cutting the concertina wire.

The concertina wire stretches for roughly 30 miles near Eagle Pass, where earlier this month the Texas Military Department seized control of a city-owned park and began denying access to Border Patrol agents.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Amy Coney Barrett, Ketanji Brown Jackson, Elena Kagan and Sonia Sotomayor sided with the administration. Justices Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas voted with Texas.

Man charged in Jan. 6 riot had been booted from Army

Associated Press

A former U.S. Army soldier who was convicted of manslaughter for fatally shooting a handcuffed civilian in Iraq was arrested Monday on charges that he attacked police officers with a baton during the U.S. Capitol riot three years ago.

Edward Richmond Jr., 40, of Geismar, La., was wearing a helmet, shoulder pads, goggles and a Louisiana state flag patch on his chest when he assaulted police in a tunnel outside the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, according to an FBI agent's affidavit.

Richmond was arrested in Baton Rouge, La., and was scheduled to make his initial court appearance Tuesday on charges including civil disorder and assaulting, resisting or impeding police with a dangerous weapon.

Richmond's Louisiana-based attorney, John McLindon, said he hadn't seen the charging documents and therefore couldn't immediately comment on the case.

Richmond was 20 when an Army court-martial panel convict-

ed him of voluntary manslaughter and sentenced him to three years in prison for killing the handcuffed Iraqi civilian near Taal Al Jai in February 2004. Richmond also received a dishonorable discharge from the Army.

Richmond initially was charged with unpremeditated murder, which carries a maximum sentence of life in prison. But the panel of five officers and five enlisted soldiers reduced the charge to voluntary manslaughter.

The Army said Richmond shot Muhamad Husain Kadir, a cow herder, in the back of the head from about six feet away after the man stumbled. Richmond testified that he didn't know Kadir was handcuffed and believed the Iraqi man was going to harm a fellow soldier.

During the Jan. 6 riot, body camera footage captured Richmond repeatedly assaulting police officers with a black baton in a tunnel on the Capitol's Lower West Terrace, the FBI said.

21 Israeli troops killed in RPG attack in Gaza

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Palestinian militants fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank that triggered an explosion that killed 21 Israeli reservists, the military said Tuesday.

Israeli reservists were preparing explosives on Monday to demolish two buildings near the built-up Maghazi refugee camp as well as the Israeli border when a militant fired a rocket-propelled grenade at a tank nearby. The blast triggered the explosives, causing both two-story buildings to collapse on the soldiers.

Later Tuesday, the military announced that ground forces had encircled the southern city of Khan Younis, Gaza's second largest, and thick, black smoke could be seen rising over the city as thousands of Palestinians fled south. Witnesses said Israeli tanks and troops had also moved into Muwasi, a nearby coastal area that the military had previously declared a safe zone for Palestinians.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mourned the soldiers, but he vowed to press ahead until "absolute victory," even as Israelis are increasingly divided over whether it's possible to both crush Hamas and free scores of captives.

A senior Egyptian official said Israel has proposed a two-month cease-fire in which the hostages would be freed in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and top Hamas leaders in Gaza would be allowed to relocate to other countries.

The official, who was not authorized to brief media and

spoke on condition of anonymity, said Hamas rejected the proposal and is insisting that no more hostages will be released until Israel ends its offensive and withdraws from Gaza. Israel's government declined to comment on the talks.

Egypt and Qatar — which have brokered past agreements between Israel and Hamas — were developing a multistage proposal to try to bridge the gaps, the official said. Families of the hostages have called for Israel to reach a deal with Hamas, saying time is running out to bring their relatives home alive.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas crossed the border Oct. 7, killing over 1,200 people and abducting some 250 others. More than 100 were released in November during a weeklong cease-fire. The offensive has caused widespread death and destruction, displaced an estimated 85% of Gaza's 2.3 million people and left one-quarter facing starvation.

Israeli media said the troops killed Monday were working to create an informal buffer zone, about a kilometer wide along the border to prevent militants from attacking Israeli communities near Gaza. Military spokesman Daniel Hagari said the mission was to clear buildings to "create the conditions" that would allow the residents of the south to return to their homes.

The United States has said it would oppose any attempt by Israel to shrink Gaza's territory.

At least 217 Israeli soldiers have been killed since the ground offensive began in late October.

Missile barrage strikes cities across Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian missiles struck three Ukrainian cities Tuesday, including its two biggest, killing at least seven people and wrecking apartment buildings after Moscow shunned any deal backed by Kyiv and its Western allies to end the nearly 2-year-old war.

The barrage included more than 40 ballistic, cruise, anti-aircraft and guided missiles, officials reported, in what the United Nations said appeared to be the heaviest bombardment since early January, when hundreds of Ukrainian civilians were killed. Ukraine's air force, whose defenses include Western-supplied systems, said it intercepted 21 of the missiles.

The attacks keep Ukrainians on edge while the 930-mile front line has barely budged. Both sides' inability to deliver major gains on the battlefield has pushed the fighting toward trench and artillery warfare. Analysts say Russia stockpiled missiles at the end of last year to

press a winter campaign of aerial bombardment.

The recent Russian bombardment was "an alarming reversal" of a trend last year that saw a drop in civilian casualties from Kremlin attacks, the U.N. said.

More than 10,000 civilians have been killed and nearly 20,000 injured since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the U.N. said.

Tuesday's onslaught in Kharkiv, in northeastern Ukraine, killed six people and injured 57, including eight children, the U.N. said.

The missiles damaged about 30 residential buildings and shattered hundreds of windows in icy weather, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said.

Russia used S-300, Kh-32 and hypersonic Iskander missiles in the attack, he said.

A five-story apartment building appeared to have been directly hit by several missiles around dawn, the U.N. Human Rights Mission in Ukraine said in a statement.

Turkey to vote on Sweden's bid for a NATO membership

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkish legislators on Tuesday began debating a long-delayed bill to approve Sweden's bid to join NATO, in a step that could remove a major hurdle for the previously nonaligned Nordic country's entry into the military alliance.

Turkey, a NATO member, has been dragging its feet on ratifying Sweden's accession for more than a year, accusing the country of being too lenient toward groups it regards as security threats. It has been seeking concessions from Sweden, including a tougher stance toward Kurdish militants and members of a network that An-

kara blames for a failed coup in 2016. Turkey has also been angered by a series of demonstrations by supporters of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party in Sweden as well as Quran-burning protests that roiled Muslim countries.

Last month, parliament's foreign affairs committee gave its consent to Sweden's bid in the first stage of the legislative process, after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan sent its accession protocol to officials for approval. Erdogan's ruling party and its nationalist allies command a majority in parliament and the protocol was expected to be approved in a vote later on Tuesday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man urinating on car cuts person asking him to stop

NY NEWYORK—A man urinating on a parked car in Manhattan slashed the throat of a passerby who told him to stop, leaving the victim clinging to life, police said Monday.

The 66-year-old victim and two other passersby complained when they saw the stranger urinating on a car parked on East 14th Street near First Avenue in the East Village about 5:05 p.m. Sunday, police said.

That sparked an argument, during which the victim was slashed in the neck, causing what police described as a “severe laceration.”

Medics rushed the victim to Mount Sinai Beth Israel in critical condition. The other passersby were not hurt.

3 air ambulance crew members killed in crash

OK WEATHERFORD — Three members of an air ambulance crew were killed when their helicopter crashed late Saturday in Oklahoma, officials said.

The crash was reported near Weatherford after the control center lost contact with the Air Evac Lifeteam helicopter crew shortly before 11:30 p.m., the company said in a statement Sunday.

The crew was returning to base in Weatherford, 70 miles west of Oklahoma City, after completing a patient care transport to the capital, the statement said.

Nearby Air Evac teams assisted law enforcement with the search for the crew members. The company did not say where

the Bell 206L3 was found and did not immediately release the victims’ names.

Rescuers save 23 lost in frigid backcountry

VT KILLINGTON — Twenty-three skiers and snowboarders had to be rescued in frigid temperatures on Saturday after becoming lost in the backcountry in Killington, Vt., police said.

After a call came in around 2:30 p.m., search and rescue crews hiked, snowshoed and used skis with skins to travel about 5 miles to bring a group of 21 lost skiers and riders back to safety, Killington police posted on Facebook. Temperatures were in the single digits.

The skiers and snowboarders warmed up in rescuers’ vehicles on their return.

Then another call came for two more lost skiers. Six rescuers went back into the woods, found them and walked them out to safety at around 7:30 p.m., police said.

Lawmakers look to curb rising property taxes

GA ATLANTA — With a runup in home values sparking higher property taxes for many Georgia homeowners, there is a groundswell among state lawmakers in this election year to provide relief.

Georgia’s Senate Finance Committee planned a hearing for Monday on a bill limiting increases in a home’s value, as assessed for property tax purposes, to 3% per year. The limit would last as long as the owner maintained a homestead exemption. Voters would have to ap-

prove the plan in a November referendum.

Meanwhile, Republican House Speaker Jon Burns of Newington proposed doubling the state’s homestead tax exemption, a measure likely to cut tax bills by nearly \$100 million statewide.

Supporters have said a cap on homes’ taxable value would keep school districts, cities and counties from increasing tax revenues by relying on rising values. Republicans have long pushed local governments to roll back tax rates to keep bills level, even requiring advertisements labeling a failure to do so as a tax increase.

Billionaire backers of new city seek voter approval

CA RIO VISTA — After years of secretly snapping up farmland for a new city northeast of San Francisco, the CEO of a company backed by Silicon Valley billionaires pitched voters last week on his vision for a walkable, affordable community that would appeal to their California pride.

Jan Sramek, a former Goldman Sachs trader spearheading the ambitious city-building effort, offered the first detailed look at his proposal to construct at least 20,000 homes in rural Solano County, between Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area.

His plan needs the approval of county voters in November to bypass protections put in place in 1984 to keep agricultural land from being turned into urban space. The state is in desperate need of more housing, especially homes affordable for teachers, firefighters and other municipal employees that make a community run.

Project proponents have said Solano County is the ideal place to build, and the location near Travis Air Force Base would appeal to military contractors. But critics, including a congressman and environmental groups, remain skeptical about the project’s aims, especially after Sramek’s company spent years secretly buying up land around the base and even suing local farmers who refused to sell. They have said more urban sprawl could harm sensitive ecosystems and tax the region’s already strained water supply.

Feds look to curb target shooting at monument

AZ PHOENIX — The federal Bureau of Land Management is looking to drastically reduce an area open to recreational target shooting within Arizona’s Sonoran Desert National Monument.

The agency announced Friday that a proposed resource management plan amendment would allow target shooting on 5,295 acres of the monument and be banned on the monument’s remaining 480,496 acres. Currently, target shooting is permitted on 435,700 acres of the monument that includes parts of Maricopa and Pinal counties.

A BLM spokesperson said target shooting still is allowed on other bureau-managed lands in and around the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Critics have argued that target shooting threatens cultural and natural resources the monument was designated to protect and has damaged objects such as saguaro cactus and Native American petroglyphs.

— From wire reports

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Embiid, Towns combine for rare night

Associated Press

Joel Embiid scored 70 in Philadelphia. Karl-Anthony Towns had 62 in Minnesota. The elite big men paired up to do something the NBA hadn't seen on the same day in more than 45 years.

So, mark it down: Jan. 22, 2024, was a day unlike almost any other in NBA history.

On the 18th anniversary of Kobe Bryant's 81-point game for the Los Angeles Lakers — the second-best scoring game in NBA history — Embiid and Towns put on a pair of dazzling, historic scoring shows of their own with a pair of career-high, franchise-record efforts.

"From the time I started playing, Kobe was my guy," Embiid said. "He's the reason why I started playing basketball. It's funny, on the same night, he got 81 and that was my favorite player."

Embiid's 70 points set the 76ers' record in Philadelphia's 133-123 win over San Antonio. Towns scored 62 points — two

more than his previous career best and Wolves record — but it wasn't enough in Minnesota's 128-125 loss to Charlotte.

Add it all up, and Monday was the fourth day in NBA history where two players scored at least 60 points. The others were April 9, 1978, (David Thompson had 73 for Denver, George Gervin had 63 for San Antonio as they dueled on the season's final day for the scoring title), Jan. 17, 1962, (Jerry West scored 63 for the Lakers, Wilt Chamberlain scored 62 for the Philadelphia Warriors) and Dec. 8, 1961 (Chamberlain had 78 for the Warriors and Elgin Baylor had 63 for the Lakers in a triple-overtime game against one another).

"These boys tonight going CRAZY!!" NBA career scoring leader LeBron James posted on X, formerly Twitter.

Added Phoenix star Kevin Durant, who had "only" 43 in the Suns' 115-113 win Monday over Chicago: "I mean, the skill level in this league is insane

and actually the coaching and the schemes on offense is insane. You're seeing so many different sets being run for bigs to get 3s. Coaches are being way more creative to put their best players in great positions to get those numbers."

Victor Wembanyama — the 7-foot-3 Spurs rookie — had 33 points for San Antonio, and even he was no match for Philly's big man, the reigning NBA MVP and two-time defending scoring champion. Embiid had 34 at halftime, and when he scored five quick points early in the third quarter, 76ers coach Nick Nurse began taking notice.

"I was like, 'Geez, that's a lot with a whole half to go. ... This'll probably be a big number tonight,'" Nurse said.

A real, real, real big number. Embiid's 70-point night tied the 12th-biggest scoring effort in NBA history, and broke Chamberlain's 76ers team record of 68 points.

Chamberlain was playing for

the Philadelphia Warriors when he set the NBA record with 100 points.

"He's a fantastic player," Spurs coach Gregg Popovich said of Embiid. "Obviously, in the running for MVP. That's for sure. But everybody already knew that."

Embiid became the ninth different player with a 70-point game: Chamberlain did it six times, and everyone else on the list — Baylor, Thompson, David Robinson, Bryant, Devin Booker, Donovan Mitchell, Damian Lillard and now Embiid — has done it once.

Embiid got to enjoy his big night since it came in a win. Towns — who had 44 points at halftime — didn't have that luxury, with the Wolves falling.

"We've got to find a way to win," said Towns, adding that he didn't see any silver lining even after scoring 62. "It's about winning the game."

It was only the second time since 1993 that a player scored at least 62 points in a loss.

Durant's late shot caps Suns' rally from 23 points down

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Kevin Durant hit a contested 17-foot jumper with 1.6 seconds left to help the Phoenix Suns erase a 23-point deficit and stun the Chicago Bulls 115-113 on Monday night.

The Suns have won six straight.

Durant finished with 43 points, eight assists and six rebounds, one night after scoring 40 in a win over the Indiana Pacers. Bradley Beal scored 18 and Devin Booker added 16.

It was a frantic final minute that saw Durant hit a wide-open 3-pointer — after an offensive rebound by Drew Eubanks — to give the Suns a 113-111 lead with 29.3 seconds remaining. But Chicago's DeMar DeRozan responded with a short jumper to tie it at 113 with 22.9 seconds left.

That set up the final possession. Grayson Allen threw the inbound pass to Jusuf Nurkic, who found Durant, who then pulled up for the jumper with Bulls defenders

draped all over him. It went in anyway.

Coby White led the Bulls with 26 points. DeRozan had 21 points and Nikola Vucevic added 19 points and 17 rebounds.

Cavaliers 126, Magic 99: Sam Merrill scored 20 of his 26 points in the first half, and visiting Cleveland beat Orlando for its eighth straight victory.

Jarrett Allen, who didn't score until the Cavs had a 21-point lead, set a franchise record with his 12th straight double-double, finishing with 14 points and 11 rebounds.

Celtics 119, Mavericks 110: Jayson Tatum had 38 points and 11 rebounds, Jaylen Brown scored 35 and visiting Boston beat Dallas.

Dallas' Luka Doncic had a triple-double with 33 points, 18 rebounds and 13 assists. Kyrie Irving scored 23.

Bucks 122, Pistons 113: Giannis Antetokounmpo had a triple-double and Khris Middleton added 26 points as visiting Mil-

waukee pulled away late and beat Detroit.

Antetokounmpo finished with 31 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists as the Bucks won for the fifth time in six games. Brook Lopez finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds.

Marcus Sasser led the Pistons with 23 points, and fellow reserve Isaiah Stewart had 19 points and eight rebounds.

Grizzlies 108, Raptors 100: Jaren Jackson Jr. scored 16 of his 27 points in the first quarter, Luke Kennard added a season-high 19 points, and Memphis won its fourth straight north of the border, beating slumping Toronto.

RJ Barrett scored 29 points for Toronto, and Scottie Barnes had 22 points and 12 rebounds. Immanuel Quickley had 10 assists.

Kings 122, Hawks 107: Harrison Barnes scored 32 points and host Sacramento beat short-handed Atlanta to snap a four-game losing streak.

Dejounte Murray had 35 points and 10 rebounds for Atlanta.

Bruins top Jets for 5th consecutive win

Associated Press

BOSTON — Charlie Coyle scored the tiebreaking goal late in the opening period and Boston's tight defense carried the Bruins to their fifth straight victory, 4-1 over the Winnipeg Jets on Monday night in a matchup of top NHL teams.

Jake DeBrusk and Jakub Lauko also scored as Boston improved to 10-1-3 in its last 14 games. Jeremy Swayman made 20 saves for the Bruins, who lead the Eastern Conference with 67 points.

DeBrusk had a short-handed goal with 5:25 left and Brad Marchand added an empty-netter. Winnipeg had given up no more than two goals in 14 consecutive games, and three or fewer in 34 straight — one short of the modern NHL record set by the 2015 Minnesota Wild.

"We knew the challenge that was ahead of us. They've been playing some good hockey and they're where they are in the standings for a reason. They don't give up a whole lot," Coyle said.

"You remember the last time we played these guys. They played really well, and we played really bad. It leaves a bad taste in your mouth and we

want to show them what we're capable of and what we can do. We definitely saw more of that tonight."

Vladislav Namestnikov scored for the Jets, who lead the Central Division with 64 points. Connor Hellebuyck stopped 17 shots.

"That's probably the worst game we've had in a long time with our breakouts," Winnipeg coach Rick Bowness said. "We were slow moving it and the passes were soft. That allows Boston to play their game."

Devils 6, Golden Knights 5 (OT): Tyler Toffoli scored 2:35 into overtime to complete his second hat trick of the season as host New Jersey rallied past Vegas.

Curtis Lazar added two goals and Nico Hischier also scored for the Devils, who had lost three of four. Simon Nemecek and Nathan Bastian each had two assists, and Vitek Vanecek stopped 28 shots.

Jonathan Marchessault scored twice and Nicolas Roy added a goal and two assists for Vegas. Pavel Dorofeyev and Chandler Stephenson also scored for the Golden Knights. Logan Thompson finished with 32 saves.

Panthers 4, Predators 1: Carter Verhaeghe had a goal and an assist in visiting Florida's victory over Nashville.

Sam Reinhart also scored and Brandon Montour and Matthew Tkachuk added empty-net goals for the Panthers, who snapped a four-game losing streak. Anthony Stolarz made 27 saves, and Sam Bennett had three assists.

Jeremy Lauzon scored and Juuse Saros stopped 34 shots for the Predators, who have lost three of four.

Coyotes 5, Penguins 2: Lawson Crouse scored a bizarre goal in the third period, Connor Ingram stopped 25 shots and host Arizona ended an 11-game losing streak to Pittsburgh.

Crouse was credited with a goal on a delayed penalty by the Coyotes when Evgeni Malkin mishandled a pass from Kris Letang and the puck trickled into the empty net as the Penguins swapped their goalie for an extra attacker. Crouse was the last Arizona player to touch the puck and got the power-play goal that put the Coyotes up 4-2.

The gaffe overshadowed Sidney Crosby's 577th career goal, which tied him with Mark Recchi for 21st place on the NHL's

career list. Lars Eller also scored and Tristan Jarry made 22 saves for the Penguins.

Canucks 2, Blackhawks 0: Thatcher Demko stopped 31 shots for his fifth shutout of the season as host Vancouver blanked Chicago.

Pius Suter and Quinn Hughes scored, and Andrei Kuzmenko had two assists to help the Canucks earn their third straight win. It was the eighth career shutout for Demko, who got his seventh straight victory and ninth in his last 10 starts.

Petr Mrazek made 27 saves for the Blackhawks.

Sharks 4, Kings 3 (SO): Fabian Zetterlund scored the first goal of the game and the clinching goal in a shootout to lift visiting San Jose over slumping Los Angeles.

William Eklund and Justin Bailey also scored in regulation for the NHL-worst Sharks, who earned their first road win against a Western Conference opponent this season and won their second consecutive game overall.

Logan Couture and Zetterlund converted in the shootout. Kaapo Kahkonen made 44 saves and denied both Los Angeles shooters in the tiebreaker.

Davis, No. 3 North Carolina rout Wake Forest

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — RJ Davis got North Carolina rolling by attacking the basket or knocking down floaters in a tough first half, then hardly missed in the second.

By the final seconds, his crowd responded by roaring "RJ! RJ!" after the 6-foot senior pushed the third-ranked Tar Heels to another double-digit win in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Davis continued his star-making season with a career-high 36 points as UNC dominated after halftime to beat Wake Forest 85-64 on Monday night. He had 23 second-half points for UNC (16-3, 8-0 ACC), which went from trailing by one at the break after failing to make a 3-pointer to consis-

tently attacking the paint to build momentum toward the rim and find a humming flow.

"I feel like I'm in my backyard just out there hooping, just trying things out," Davis said in describing "a zone that every hooper knows."

The capper was a big hug from coach Hubert Davis as he checked out.

"I think RJ opened the game up for sure, like in every aspect," said freshman guard Elliot Cadeau, who had 14 points.

No. 7 Kansas 74, Cincinnati 69: Johnny Furphy had career-highs of 23 points and 11 rebounds, Kevin McCullar Jr. scored 20 despite struggling with his shot, and the host Jayhawks beat the Bearcats in the first Big 12 matchup between the schools.

KJ Adams Jr. added 11 points and Hunter Dickinson overcame foul trouble to score 10, helping Kansas (16-3, 4-2) bounce back from a loss at West Virginia and extend its homecourt winning streak to 15 games.

Cold-shooting Cincinnati (13-6, 2-4), wrapping up a stretch of six straight against ranked teams, got within 64-57 when Day Day Thomas ended its 6-plus minute field-goal drought with just over 2½ minutes to play. But at the other end, Furphy hit a 3-pointer from the wing as the shot clock expired, and the Jayhawks were able to hang on from there.

Dan Skillings Jr. led the Bearcats with 16 points. Leading scorer Viktor Lakhin was held to seven on 1-for-6 shooting.

Gauff survives, advances to semifinals

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Coco Gauff hopes she's got her "bad" match out of the way at the Australian Open before meeting defending champion Aryna Sabalenka in the semifinals.

It'll be a rematch of the U.S. Open final, which the 19-year-old Gauff won in three sets for her first major title.

Gauff is on a 12-match winning roll at the majors after rallying from 5-1 down in the first set to beat Marta Kostyuk 7-6 (6), 6-7 (3), 6-2 in a quarterfinal that lasted more than three hours.

Sabalenka is on a 12-match streak at Melbourne Park after her 6-2, 6-3 win over No. 9-seeded Barbora Krejčíková in the first match of the night session that didn't start until after 9 p.m.

"I love it. I love it," Sabalenka

said of the showdown with Gauff. "After U.S. Open, I really wanted that revenge, and, I mean, that's a great match."

Gauff's long three-setter had a knock-on effect that made for a long night at Melbourne Park. It took Novak Djokovic 3¾ hours to hold off Taylor Fritz 7-6 (3), 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 and reach the Australian Open semifinals for the 11th time.

Sabalenka's match started at 9:09 p.m. and the last men's match, No. 4 Jannik Sinner against No. 5 Andrey Rublev, didn't start until 10:42 p.m.

After winning her first major here last year, Sabalenka reached the semifinals at the French Open and Wimbledon before her run to the final in New York, finishing the year ranked No. 2.

In five rounds so far, she has dropped just 16 games and been

on court for a total of 5¼ hours.

"I played great tennis," Sabalenka said after beating Krejčíková, the 2021 French Open champion. "I hope I can keep playing that way, or even better."

Gauff hadn't dropped a set until she faced No. 37-ranked Kostyuk, who ripped 39 winners but also made 56 unforced errors in a relentlessly attacking game.

"Today was definitely a C game," Gauff said. "Didn't play my best tennis but really proud that I was able to get through. Hopefully got the bad match out of the way and I can play even better."

Gauff had 51 unforced errors, nine double-faults and had just 17 winners in a match containing 16 service breaks.

Her forehand was particularly vulnerable and Kostyuk took

full advantage, racing to 5-1 only to show her own fragility with two double-faults to hand back one of the breaks.

Gauff recovered to save a set point at 5-3 before leveling at 5-5. Kostyuk had another set point in the tiebreaker but couldn't convert.

The mistakes continued to flow, and though she led 5-3 in the second set, Gauff could not close it out. She was two points from victory at 6-5, 40-40, but Kostyuk held and took the tiebreak 7-3 to level.

The Ukrainian player said she was pleased to have made the quarterfinals at a Grand Slam for the first time.

"Very proud of myself," she said. "I won for myself today and it's the most important thing. It's just the beginning of the season. Looking forward for what's ahead."

Djokovic holds off Fritz in Aussie semis for 11th time

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Nobody has ever been better at this end of the Australian Open than Novak Djokovic, the 10-time champion.

Every time he's won a quarterfinal at Melbourne Park — as he did against Taylor Fritz on Tuesday — he's gone on to win the title.

The odds are usually stacked against his semifinal rival. Perhaps even more so against fourth-seeded Jannik Sinner, who won a quarterfinal over No. 5 Andrey Rublev that didn't start until 10:42 p.m. and didn't finish until 1:21 a.m. Wednesday.

Djokovic reached his record-extending 48th Grand Slam semifinal by beating Fritz 7-6 (3), 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 in 3¾ hours. Their match started late in the heat of the afternoon because U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff's preceding win over Marta Kostyuk took more than three hours.

Djokovic said Sinner's late finish wouldn't be a factor in Friday's semifinals.

"What kind of advantage will I have? We have two days. It's not much of an advantage that I see there," he said. "Plenty of time for whoever wins that match tonight to recover."

The start of the night session was pushed back past 9 p.m. and could have gone very, very late if not for women's champion Aryna Sabalenka and Sinner both winning in straight sets.

Sinner was down 5-1 in the second-set tiebreaker before winning six consecutive points, starting with a stunning cross-court forehand, to turn momentum and take the match 6-4, 7-6 (5), 6-3.

"I want to thank everyone for staying so long," Sinner said in his on-court interview. "It's always a huge pleasure to play here on this court. It doesn't really matter the time."

Since losing to Djokovic in last

year's Wimbledon semifinals, Sinner has won two of his three matches against the 24-time major champion.

"I'm really lucky to face him again (in) one of the biggest tournaments in the world," he said. "Happy I can play the No. 1 in the world. He won here some times!"

Sinner hasn't dropped a set. Djokovic, meanwhile, has spent more time on court through five rounds than ever at Melbourne Park — more than 15 hours — but thinks he's still building into it. He's on a 33-match winning streak at the Australian Open — a tournament record he shares with his childhood inspiration, Monica Seles.

The first game took 16 minutes and the first set lasted 1 hour, 24 minutes. Fritz got the first break of serve and maintained it to win the second set.

"Credit to him for playing really well. You could see that he

had a clear game plan. He was really sharp," Djokovic said. "So it was definitely a struggle for me to play the first couple sets."

The first game set the tone for a long, tough match. It contained 24 points, going to deuce nine times.

Then followed the longest first set of the tournament. In the tiebreaker, Djokovic finished a 21-shot rally with a stunning backhand crosscourt winner to get five set points. He put his finger to his ear, nodded his head and blew a kiss toward a commentary box at the rear of the court.

After two tight sets, Fritz was broken in the second game of the third when Djokovic converted his 16th chance. Djokovic broke again, at love, in the ninth game to wrap up the third.

In the fourth, there was an exchange of breaks until Djokovic served it out from 5-3 to improve to 9-0 against Fritz in career head-to-heads.