

Ex-Pentagon chief Rumsfeld dies at 88

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Rumsfeld, the two-time defense secretary and one-time presidential candidate whose reputation as a skilled bureaucrat and visionary of a modern U.S. military was unraveled by the long and costly Iraq war, died Tuesday. He was 88.

In a statement Wednesday, Rumsfeld's family said he "was surrounded by family in his beloved Taos, New Mexico."

President George W. Bush, under whom Rumsfeld served as Pentagon chief, hailed his "steady service as a wartime secretary of defense — a duty he carried out with strength, skill, and honor."

Regarded by former colleagues as equally smart and combative, patriotic and politically cunning, Rumsfeld had a storied career in government under four presidents and nearly a quarter century in corporate America.

After retiring in 2008 he headed the Rumsfeld Foundation to promote public service and to work with charities that provide services and support for military families and wounded veterans.

"Rummy," as he was often called, was ambitious, witty, energetic, engaging and capable of great personal warmth. But he irritated many with his confrontational style. An accomplished wrestler in college, Rumsfeld relished verbal sparring and elevated it to an art form; a biting humor was a favorite weapon.

Still, he built a network of loyalists who admired his work ethic, intelligence and impatience with all who failed to share his sense of urgency.

Rumsfeld is the only person to serve twice as Pentagon chief. The first time, in 1975-77, he was the youngest ever. The next time, in 2001-06, he was the oldest.

He made a brief run for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination, a spectacular flop that he once described as humbling for a man used to success at the highest levels of the government, including stints as White House chief of staff, U.S. ambassador and member of Congress.

For all Rumsfeld's achievements, it was the setbacks in Iraq in the twilight of his career that will likely etch the most vivid features of his legacy.

Nine months into his second tour as de-

fense secretary, on Sept. 11, 2001, suicide hijackers attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon, thrusting the nation into wars for which the military was ill-prepared. Rumsfeld oversaw the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and toppling of the Taliban regime. Frequently presiding at televised briefings on the war, Rumsfeld became something of a TV star, applauded for his blunt talk and uncompromising style.

By 2002 the Bush administration's attention shifted to Iraq, which played no role in the Sept. 11 attacks. The war effort in Afghanistan took a back seat to Iraq, opening the way for the Taliban to make a comeback and prevent the U.S. from sealing the success of its initial invasion.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was launched in March 2003. Baghdad fell quickly, but U.S. and allied forces soon became consumed with a violent insurgency. Critics faulted Rumsfeld for dismissing the pre-invasion assessment of the Army's top general, Eric Shinseki, that several hundred thousand allied troops would be needed to stabilize Iraq.

Rumsfeld is survived by his wife, Joyce, three children and seven grandchildren.

US military shifts Army basing from Qatar to Jordan

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. has closed sprawling bases in Qatar that once stored warehouses full of weaponry and transferred the remaining supplies to Jordan, in a move that analysts say positions Washington to deal better with Iran and reflects the military's changing priorities in the region.

Military leaders shuttered U.S. Army Camp As Sayliyah-Main last month, along with Camp As Sayliyah-South, and an ammunition supply point named Falcon, an Army statement last week said.

Camp As Sayliyah was known among many service members for its Rest and Recuperation Pass Program, which gave some 200,000 deployed troops a four-day vacation. The program ran from 2002 to 2011 and offered travelers up to two glasses of beer or wine a day, along with golf and beach trips.

The camp also served as a forward stag-

ing area for U.S. supplies in the Middle East, with 27 warehouses storing tanks, armored personnel carriers and a variety of equipment, the Army statement said.

Supplies from the three bases, as well as a support mission based there, are now part of Area Support Group-Jordan, a U.S. Central Command statement said.

Closing the bases and moving the mission to Jordan could benefit the U.S. in potential disputes with Iran, said Kamran Bokhari, a national security and policy expert focusing on the region at the Washington-based Center for Global Policy.

The Biden administration has signaled a desire to negotiate a deal with Iran to ensure the country does not develop nuclear weapons. The Trump administration pulled out of a multilateral deal signed in 2015 with Iran, calling the limits on Tehran inadequate.

Moving U.S. troops to Jordan decreases the threat of rocket attacks in the Gulf re-

gion from Iranian-backed militias. The threat of missile strikes against U.S. troops like last year's attack on al Asad Air Base, which left more than 100 injured, is an important tool in Tehran's negotiating strategy, Bokhari said.

"You want to be able to deny the Iranians that leverage, in a negotiation," Bokhari said. "If they're signaling that they have your bases in missile range, that decreases your leverage behind the scenes."

The closure of the three bases comes as the U.S. shifts resources throughout the CENTCOM area of responsibility.

This includes the U.S. drawdown from Afghanistan after 20 years there, as well as the withdrawal of eight Patriot antimissile batteries from Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

The U.S. will continue to use Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, a basing hub for CENTCOM, last week's Army statement said.

Visa sought for Afghan whose boss was kidnapped

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A refugee advocacy group has filed a lawsuit on behalf of an Afghan engineer who says he supported the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan “at great personal risk,” but was denied a U.S. visa because his supervisor was kidnapped and couldn’t verify his eligibility.

The lawsuit, submitted last week, seeks to overrule the U.S. government’s decision to reject the Afghan man’s Special Immigrant Visa application.

“We felt this is what we needed to do to vindicate his rights,” Katie Austin, an attorney with the International Refugee Assistance Project, which filed the litigation, said in a phone interview Wednesday.

The man, whose name was not revealed because of security concerns, submitted his visa application in 2016. It included a reference letter from his supervisor, Mark Randall Frerichs, a Navy veteran, according to the complaint filed in District of Columbia federal court.

Two years later, after confirming the authenticity of Frerichs’ letter, the government agreed the man was eligible for a visa and al-

lowed him and his family to proceed to the later stages of the application process, the complaint said.

But in 2020, after suspected Taliban-affiliated militants kidnapped Frerichs and he was unable to “reverify” the letter, the government revoked the initial authorization, resulting in the application being rejected, the complaint added.

“Our client’s story is emblematic of the problems with the SIV program, which is plagued not only by delays but also by faulty decision-making that can be the difference between life and death,” Austin said in a separate statement Wednesday.

“Now more than ever, it is critical for U.S. officials to afford our Afghan allies the protections that Congress intended,” Austin said.

Congress enacted the Afghan Allies Protection Act in 2009 to enable certain Afghans who worked for the U.S. government in Afghanistan to immigrate to the U.S. with their families through the SIV program.

As the U.S. continues its final withdrawal from the country, President Joe Biden has come under increasing pressure to do more to help the roughly 18,000 people who have applied for SIVs and believe their lives are at risk

in Afghanistan because they worked for the United States.

The administration last month said it would evacuate the applicants to a location outside the mainland U.S., possibly Guam, where they could complete the application process. Administering the visas has been delayed since last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The man being represented by the International Refugee Assistance Project, described as managing numerous sensitive construction projects on behalf of the U.S., has already fled with his family to India, the group said.

Meanwhile, the government continues to offer a reward of up to \$5 million for information leading to the location, recover and return of Frerichs, who was working as a contractor in eastern Khost province when he disappeared in January 2020.

Speaking to reporters in Washington last week, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani said Biden did not mention Frerichs’ disappearance during a meeting at the White House.

Frerichs’ supporters have expressed concern that the U.S. exit could make it more difficult to bring him back home, particularly because the U.S. will have weaker intelligence capabilities.

Attorney: Marine’s role in soldier’s death was minor

Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. — A defense attorney for a U.S. Marine told jurors Wednesday that he played a minor role in the hazing of a U.S. Green Beret and should not be found guilty of murder and other crimes in the soldier’s death.

Speaking inside a Navy base in Virginia, Marine Lt. Col. Timothy Kuhn said that Mario Madera-Rodriguez never touched Staff Sgt. Logan Melgar during the fatal hazing incident in Africa in 2017 until he tried to help revive him.

“Facts have been manipulated and moved around like a puzzle to fit the government’s theory,” Kuhn said.

Kuhn spoke during closing arguments at the trial for Madera-Rodriguez. The Marine is the last of four American servicemembers to face a court-martial in Melgar’s killing.

Madera-Rodriguez, who belongs

to a special operations group in the Marines known as the Raiders, is the only one of the four men to plead not guilty. The others, another Marine and two Navy SEALs, have already made plea deals with military prosecutors.

Military prosecutors have said the men were angry over Melgar’s perceived slights during their time in Mali. Their plan was to choke Melgar into unconsciousness and then humiliate him while filming it on a phone camera, prosecutors said.

Despite the “textbook” risks and known dangers of such chokeholds, “they do it anyway,” military prosecutor Navy Cmdr. Benjamin Garcia said Wednesday during his closing argument.

Garcia said Madera-Rodriguez chose to help restrain him while a Navy SEAL applied the chokehold. Melgar died of strangulation.

Vaccine rates of Marines, airmen below US average

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The rate of active-duty members of the Marine Corps and Air Force receiving at least one coronavirus vaccine dose lags behind the national vaccination rate, Army Lt. Gen. Ronald J. Place, director of the Defense Health Agency, said Wednesday.

About 58% of active-duty Marines and 61% of active-duty airmen are at least partially vaccinated against the coronavirus as of Wednesday, Place told reporters at the Pentagon.

Nationwide, about 65.7% of adults had received at least one dose of the vaccine as of Monday, according to the latest statistics from the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Some of the disparity could be attributed to the ages of active-duty

service members, said Dr. Terry Adirim, acting assistant secretary of defense for health affairs. The most-vaccinated demographic of Americans are people ages 65 or older with 87.5% having received at least one shot, which skews the national average higher, according to the CDC.

“I don’t want to put too fine a point on this, but 31% of our active duty are under the age of 35, which is one of the populations that’s perhaps the toughest to have vaccinated nationally,” Adirim said.

Still, the Navy and Army’s partial-vaccination rates are above the national rate, with 77% of active-duty sailors and 70% of active-duty soldiers having received at least one vaccine, Place said. He could not provide numbers on how many active-duty service members were fully vaccinated.

Naval Academy boosts intensity on Induction Day

The Capital

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Emma Single will miss music the most during the six-week Plebe Summer.

That, and Netflix.

That's just part of not having a phone. Already, the incoming plebe will have turned in her phone, her wallet, her watch, practically any personal belonging with few exceptions.

She prepared for the six weeks. She went surfing, hung out with her family. Tuesday night, she watched Pixar's "Luca." On the way to the U.S. Naval Academy, Single listened to music. When it comes to her phone, she had not yet parted with it despite knowing she would give it up for several weeks.

"I'm going cold turkey," she said.

For Single, 19, arriving on campus for Induction Day is the beginning of a journey sought after since her freshman year in high school when she attended an academy lacrosse game.

The academy welcomed 1,186 new midshipmen to the Yard on Tuesday and Wednesday as part of the two-day Induction Day.

There are still some challenges to overcome, as the pandemic is

not completely over, said Lt. Col. Todd McCarthy, plebe summer officer in charge. Still, this year there are no restrictions and plebe summer is moving forward.

The plebes this year will not have to spend two weeks in a restriction of movement period, confined to their rooms. They will be able to participate in close contact activities.

"And this year, we're trying to turn up the discipline a little bit," McCarthy said. "We're trying to turn up the intensity a little bit."

But the Class of 2025 looks ready, he said. They are dedicated and motivated.

"I mean, they're excited," McCarthy said. "I can see it, and I can feel it. Everybody can."

On the Yard, the only sign of the deadly pandemic, which altered much of the academy's last year and resulted in a shortened plebe summer, were white masks that each of the midshipmen wore as they made their way through Alumni Hall.

Even those came off after the plebes read their Reef Points, as long as they were vaccinated.

Single is from Millersville, Md. She comes to the academy with a year of collegiate experience already underneath her white belt.

Prior to coming to the academy, she attended Louisiana State University for a year. As someone who ultimately wanted to attend the academy, she participated in the civilian preparatory program, which allows people to go through similar training as those who attend the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Rhode Island.

Now, Single is at the academy and Wednesday evening she took the oath swearing her into the military.

"Part of it doesn't feel real, to be honest," she said, standing on the sidewalk outside of Alumni Hall, where Induction Day procedures took place. "I am absolutely over the moon though."

To start her induction process, Single first had to check-in and then follow the winding path through Alumni Hall that would lead her to each station.

She would receive her name badge. She would start giving her paperwork. She would learn the proper way to address every officer or older midshipman.

She would get yelled at.

Her uncle, a class of 1995 graduate, told her not to take the shouts personally.

But the detailers, the people in charge of I-Day, certainly tried. A

set of four spent hours in the faces of plebes, telling them to hurry as they had to grab their bags and head to the next station.

If it was a question, the proper response is sir, yes, sir. Or ma'am, yes, ma'am. But if it is acknowledgment, it should be sir, aye, sir. That tripped up many of the soon-to-be midshipmen.

Emily Messinese, of Manchester, Md., was ahead of Single by about an hour and a half. And she received a fair amount of shouts as she made her way through Alumni Hall.

After receiving her uniform, she needed to get her name badge back on. She did not do it fast enough, and a detailer made sure she knew it.

Messinese wants to serve, she said. That's why she applied to and chose the Naval Academy.

She wanted a different college experience than most of her high school classmates, and she'll get that during the summer training.

But first, Messinese needed to get through Induction Day.

Wednesday evening Single and Messinese stood with the other members of the class of 2025 and took the oath, officially making them midshipmen.

Then plebe summer began.

SEAL will oversee special ops anti-terrorism efforts in Africa

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Rear Adm. Milton J. Sands, an officer with previous stints on multiple Navy SEAL teams, took over Thursday as head of the military's special operations mission in Africa.

Sands replaced Maj. Gen. Dagvin Anderson, who led Special Operations Command Africa for the past two years, during a change of command ceremony at the unit's Stuttgart headquarters.

A key moment during Anderson's tenure was overseeing the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Somalia in January. The effort to relocate about 700 troops and equipment out of Somalia involved sending thou-

sands of additional troops to the region, along with ships and fighter planes, to ensure the safety of personnel during the mission.

Sands will oversee a special operations mission in Somalia that, for now, mostly relies on rotating troops in and out of the country to support local forces in their battle against the al-Qaida aligned militant group al-Shabab. Sands also will contend with terrorist threats in other parts of Africa.

Sands previously served as commander of the Naval Service Training Command in Great Lakes, Ill. Other assignments included two tours with SEAL Team 2 and command of SEAL Team 8. He is a 1992 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy.

4-legged Marines transfer to serve USAF in Japan

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A pair of black Labrador retrievers have gone from green to blue, moving from the III Marine Expeditionary Force to new jobs with the Air Force's 374th Security Forces Squadron in Tokyo.

Splash and Allie — 4- and 5-year-old females — flew from Camp Hansen on Okinawa to the home of U.S. Forces Japan and 5th Air Force in the Japanese capital this spring, said Tech. Sgt. Seth Shannon, the security forces squadron's kennel master.

The dogs, which cost \$100,000 to train, came from a deployment program that the Marines are downsizing, Shannon said during a recent inter-

view at Yokota's kennels.

Splash and Allie give the squadron enhanced capabilities that could come in handy on a deployment, he said. Unlike Yokota's other military working dogs, they can work off-leash, sniffing out explosives far from their handlers who can direct them with hand signals.

The Labradors aren't trained to bite and detain intruders like Yokota's other dogs, all German shepherds and Belgian Malinois, said Shannon, who once deployed to the United Arab Emirates as a handler.

Last week, the airmen put the former "devil dogs" through their paces on an obstacle course near the kennels. Their reward was getting to chase down a tennis ball hurled by their masters.

China's President Xi gives defiant anniversary speech

Associated Press

BEIJING — Chinese President Xi Jinping warned Thursday that anyone who tries to bully China “will face broken heads and bloodshed,” in a defiant speech hailing the country’s rise that elicited loud cheers from an carefully chosen crowd at a celebration of the centenary of the founding of the ruling Communist Party.

In unusually forceful language, Xi appeared to be hitting back at the U.S. and others that have criticized the rising power’s trade and technology policies, military expansion and human rights record. In an hourlong speech, he also said the nation must stick to its one-party rule, emphasizing the communists’ role in lifting China to global prominence.

The rally — which featured a military flyover and people waving Chinese flags and singing patriotic songs — in some ways recalled the mass events held by Mao Zedong, communist China’s founding leader. Xi even wore a gray buttoned-up suit like the ones favored by Mao and spoke from the same balcony atop Tiananmen Gate where the revolutionary leader declared the start of communist rule in 1949. More than 70,000 people attended Thursday, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Xi, who heads the party and is thought to be considering a third term starting next year, received the biggest applause when he said the party had restored China’s dignity after decades of subjugation to Western powers and Japan in the 19th and 20th centuries, and turned it into the world’s second largest economy in recent decades.

“The Chinese people will absolutely not allow any foreign force to bully, oppress or enslave us and anyone who attempts to do so will face broken heads and bloodshed in front of the iron Great Wall of the 1.4 billion Chinese people,” said Xi, who has eliminated limits on his time in office, prompting speculation that he could rule for life, as Mao did.

The strong language appeared aimed at revving up and playing to a domestic audience. The strongest elements of it — the references to bashing heads and bloodshed — were left out of state media’s English translation of the quote.

Xi declared that China had restored order in Hong Kong following anti-government protests in 2019 and reiterated the Communist Party’s determination to bring self-governing Taiwan under its control.

Both policies have been widely criticized by Western democracies. They have accused the Communist Party of abusing its power at home, including detaining more than 1 million Uyghurs and other mainly Muslim minorities for political reeducation in the northwest region of Xinjiang, and for imprisoning or intimidating into silence those it sees as potential opponents from Tibet to Hong Kong.

Xi also said the party would retain absolute control over the military, which now has the world’s second-largest annual budget after the U.S. “We will turn the people’s military into a world-class military, with even stronger capabilities and even more reliable means to safeguard the nation’s sovereignty, security and development interests,” he said.

Safety concerns halt rescue efforts at condo collapse

Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. — Rescue efforts at the site of a partially collapsed Florida condominium building were halted Thursday out of concern about the stability of the remaining structure, officials said.

Search crews that have been atop the pile of rubble for the last week stopped work shortly after 2 a.m., Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava told a news conference.

The stoppage came on the same day that President Joe Biden visited the area and offered comfort to the grieving and federal support for the ongoing efforts to search for the missing and rebuild after.

“This is life and death,” Biden said a briefing about the collapse. “We can do it, just the simple act of everyone doing what needs to be done, makes a difference.”

The president said he believed the federal government has “the power to pick up 100% of the cost” of the search and cleanup and urged the local officials to turn to Washington for assistance.

“You all know it, because a lot of you have been through it as well,” Biden said. “There’s gonna be a lot of pain and anxiety and suffering and even the need for psychological help in the days and months that follow. And so, we’re not going anywhere.”

The president’s visit comes a week after Champlain Towers South, a 12-story beachfront condominium building in Surfside, suddenly came crashing down.

Searchers going through the ruins found the remains of six people Wednesday, bringing the number of confirmed dead to 18. The number of residents unaccounted for stands at 145.

Trump Organization CFO surrenders as charges loom

Associated Press

The Trump Organization’s longtime chief financial officer, Allen Weisselberg, surrendered to authorities early Thursday ahead of an expected court appearance on the first criminal indictment in a two-year investigation into business practices at Donald Trump’s company.

Weisselberg was photographed walking into the complex that houses criminal courts and the Manhattan district attorney’s office with his lawyer.

New York prosecutors were expected to announce an indictment Thursday accusing Weisselberg and Trump’s namesake company of tax crimes related to fringe benefits for employees.

The case against Weisselberg — a loyal lieutenant to Trump and his real estate-developer father, Fred — could give prosecutors the means to pressure the executive into cooperating and telling them what he knows about Trump’s business dealings.

The Trump Organization issued a state-

ment defending Weisselberg, saying the 48-year employee is being used by the Manhattan district attorney’s office as “a pawn in a scorched-earth attempt to harm the former president.” It said neither the IRS nor any other district attorney would ever think of bringing such charges over employee benefits. “This is not justice; this is politics,” the organization said.

The planned charges were said to be linked to benefits the company gave to top executives people familiar with the matter said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dad stuck in traffic, girl, 9, helps mom give birth

MO BELTON — A suburban Kansas City family is celebrating their newest addition, born early at home with the help of the infant's 9-year-old sister.

The surprise at-home birth happened after Angelica Gunn, of Belton, started having contractions more than a week before her due date, television station WDAF reported. She called her husband, Caleb Gunn, to rush home, but he became stuck in heavy traffic.

That's when 9-year-old Aakayla Gunn stepped in to help, catching her sister Aubree Rose, as the baby was born.

"I screamed for Aakayla to come in," Angelica recounted. "And she's like, 'I can't look.' And I'm like, 'You have to.'"

Luckily for all involved, Angelica is a nurse and certified doula and was able to talk Aakayla through the delivery process.

Baby Aubree came into the world at a healthy 7 pounds, 9 ounces and provided her big sister with an unforgettable experience.

Police: Man drives into gun shop, steals firearms

ND BISMARCK — Police say a Bismarck man drove a vehicle into a gun shop storefront and stole four rifles, which were later recovered after the man was arrested.

According to police Lt. Luke Gardiner, the 22-year-old man rammed a service-type vehicle with cabinets into the front door of Double H Guns and stole what Gardiner called "a number of firearms."

Police responded to a report of a gas drive-off at a Holiday sta-

tion and the vehicle fit the one that was used in the gun shop robbery. Gardiner said officers followed the vehicle. The man tried to flee but was eventually arrested.

The guns were still in the vehicle and were recovered, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

28 rescued when roller coaster stops, no injuries

VA WILLIAMSBURG — Fire crews helped more than two dozen people get to safety after a roller coaster at a Virginia amusement park stopped unexpectedly on Tuesday evening, officials said.

News outlets reported that 28 people were riding the Griffon roller coaster at Busch Gardens Williamsburg when it stopped.

The evacuation went smoothly and no one was injured, James City County Fire Chief Ryan Ashe said.

In a statement, Busch Gardens officials apologized and said safety is their top priority. The amusement park describes Griffon on its website as a floorless dive coaster with 205-foot drop.

It's not yet clear why the coaster stopped, Ashe said.

6 hurt when deck collapses at townhouse

MD GERMANTOWN — Six people were taken to a hospital after townhouse deck collapsed in Maryland.

WTOP-FM reported that it happened when the deck separated from a home in The Woods at North Lake community in Germantown.

Nine people were barbecuing on the deck when it collapsed, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue spokesman Pete Piringer said. Six of those people were

transported to the hospital, including one who was taken to a trauma center. All are expected to survive.

Piringer said a building inspector and fire code enforcement agent were called to the scene.

Sheriff: Man tried to pay bail with counterfeit bills

ME WATERBORO — A man in Maine tried to post \$200 bail with counterfeit bills, according to the sheriff's office.

Deputies responding to a report of a stolen vehicle in Waterboro stopped a man walking nearby, the York County Sheriff's Office wrote in a Facebook post. They determined that he was not involved but arrested him on an outstanding warrant for theft from a Walmart, Sheriff William King said.

The man said he had enough money to post \$200 in bail but when the bail commissioner arrived, he tried to pay with two counterfeit \$100 bills. He was denied bail and was returned to jail with the additional charge of forgery.

The man posted \$100 in bail later in the day, the sheriff's office said.

Man ticketed in dog park for tree treatment

IL NAPERVILLE — A man who said he sprayed trees in a suburban Chicago park to protect them after an anxious dog chewed off the bark has been ticketed by authorities.

Asher Thomas is accused of "altering flora" in a Naperville dog park. The ticket from the Will County Forest Preserve carries a \$225 fine, the Aurora Beacon-News reported.

"Just as you can't go around doing things to other people's property, even if intentions are good, you can't allow your dogs to do damage or spray a foreign substance on trees," said Forest Preserve Deputy Police Chief Dave Barrios.

Thomas said he regularly takes his dog, Dixie, to Whalon Lake Dog Park and learned that another owner's German shepherd had gnawed away the bark on more than a dozen trees. He said he used a can of tree pruning sealer to cover the wounds.

"The whole purpose was to prevent trees from being lost," said Thomas, who works for the U.S. Coast Guard. "What if I saved the trees? What if the other nine I did not spray died and the ones I treated lived?"

School officer fired for using stun gun in training

OH SANDUSKY — A longtime school resource officer who used a stun gun on two high school students during a self-defense training class has been fired.

Perkins Township trustees voted 3-0 to dismiss Tonya Corbin, who was a resource officer at Perkins High School. She had been on unpaid leave since June 15.

Corbin was teaching a self-defense class for female students at the school on May 19 when she brought a stun gun to the class and used it on two students, ages 17 and 18, authorities said. Corbin initially denied using the stun gun, saying she had allowed the students to use it themselves. The two students and a teacher at the school disputed that claim, and Corbin eventually admitted to deploying the stun gun, authorities said.

— From wire reports

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Paul powers Phoenix into NBA Finals

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Tears welled in Chris Paul's eyes. A message in black ink on his shoes said it all: Can't give up now.

Not when, after 16 years, he will finally play for an NBA title.

Paul led the Phoenix Suns into their first NBA Finals in 28 years, beating the Los Angeles Clippers 130-103 on Wednesday night to close out the Western Conference finals in six games.

"I was on a don't-lose mission," Paul said. "Just a lot of emotion. A lot of (things) going on."

Paul scored 41 points and Devin Booker added 22 to send the Suns to their third Finals appearance in franchise history. They will face either the Atlanta Hawks or Milwaukee Bucks, who are tied 2-2 in the East finals.

"He was tired," Phoenix coach Monty Williams said of Paul. "He was still making those kind of plays, getting to the basket, threes, orchestrating everything."

"He has persevered through a lot — injuries, playoff heart-

break."

Paul missed the first two games against the Clippers after testing positive for the coronavirus. He injured his shoulder in the first round against the Lakers. Add in numerous surgeries and making the conference finals one other time, only to fall short.

"It's been a lot, I'm telling you," he said.

Paul reached the NBA Finals for the first time on the same Staples Center court where he helped bring the Clippers to respectability over six seasons that ended in 2017 without ever getting past the second round. The 36-year-old guard punished his old team with 31 points in the second half and tied his playoff career high of 41 — the same amount Paul George had in pushing the Clippers to a road win in Game 5.

"I'm just so happy for all the people around me," Paul said on the court after the game, "and the Clippers are my family, too. These fans, Billy Crystal, that's my family. This is a team I have the utmost respect for, I'll always be a Clipper."

"But this group right here, this group right here," he said, gesturing at his Suns teammates wearing NBA Finals hats.

The West trophy glinted under the arena lights as orange-clad Suns fans outcheered boos from Clippers fans. Paul's family, including leaping 12-year-old son, Chris, celebrated in a suite.

"This is what we set out to get tonight, so we didn't want to go back to Phoenix without it," Booker said.

Phoenix is the first team to reach the NBA Finals after a 10-year playoff drought. The Suns had the league's second-best record in this pandemic-interrupted season. They knocked off the defending champion Los Angeles Lakers in the first round and swept Denver in the semifinals.

The Suns last made the NBA Finals in 1993, when they were led by Charles Barkley and lost to Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls in six games.

Their only other finals appearance was in 1976, a loss to the Boston Celtics in six games.

Things got chippy in the fourth. Going into a timeout with 5:48 remaining, Paul stared at Patrick Beverley as he walked by. Beverley turned around and shoved Paul hard in the back, sending him to the floor. Beverley was ejected.

"We knew we broke them," Jae Crowder said. "There's no better sign. That's a great feeling to have."

Marcus Morris led the Clippers with 26 points despite playing with a sore knee. George had 21 points and nine rebounds coming off his career playoff high that staved off elimination and brought his team back home for another chance.

But the exhausted Clippers — who rallied from 0-2 series deficits in getting to the West finals for the first time in franchise history — had little left in the tank. They were again without two-time NBA Finals MVP Kawhi Leonard, who has been out with a right knee sprain, and center Ivica Zubac. He missed his second straight game because of an MCL sprain in his right knee.

Barty avoids Wimbledon upset trend, advances

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Top-ranked Ash Barty advanced to the third round of a Wimbledon women's draw depleted of other top contenders by beating Anna Blinkova 6-4, 6-3 Thursday.

No. 3-seeded Elina Svitolina became the latest upset victim, and eight of the top 11 players in the WTA rankings are out of the tournament due to defeat, withdrawal or injury.

Barty avoided an exit by overcoming an uncharacteristically unreliable serve. She committed nine double-faults, including three in the first game, and was broken three times. But she also hit 33 winners to 12 for Blinkova.

"Not my best serving day," Barty said. "I was just out of rhythm a little bit. Some days you feel like you're 8-feet tall and you can't

miss the box. Other days, like today, you feel like you're 3-foot-nothing. It's certainly nothing that will concern me over a longer period."

Barty, the 2019 French Open champion, needs two more wins to become a Wimbledon quarterfinalist for the first time.

Svitolina lost to Magda Linette, who earned the biggest victory of her career, 6-3, 6-4. The Polish player, ranked 44th, had never before beaten a top-15 opponent in a completed match.

Linette had 28 winners to just eight for Svitolina, a semifinalist at Wimbledon two years ago.

Coco Gauff was back on Centre Court after Barty and beat an opponent twice her age to reach the third round.

The 17-year-old American defeated 34-year-old Russian veteran Elena Vesnina 6-4,

6-3 to keep her on track for making another run into the second week at the All England Club.

French Open champion Barbora Krejickova extended her winning streak to 14 matches by beating Andrea Petkovic 7-5, 6-4.

In men's play, second-seeded Daniil Medvedev saw off promising Spanish teenager Carlos Alcaraz 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 to match his best result at Wimbledon by making the third round. Fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev hit 13 aces, lost only 12 points on his serve and beat Tennys Sandgren 7-5, 6-2, 6-3.

Britain advanced three men to the third round for the first time in 22 years. Cameron Norrie received a standing ovation on Court 1 when he won to join Andy Murray and Dan Evans in the round of 32 by sweeping wild card Alex Bolt 6-3, 6-1, 6-2.

Lightning take 2-0 lead in Stanley Cup

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy tried not to think about needing to outduel Carey Price while the Montreal Canadiens were making him make one difficult save after another.

Blake Coleman had no time to think when the clock was running out in a terrible second period for the Tampa Bay Lightning before singlehandedly putting his team on top.

No thinking, just winning turned out just fine for the defending champions. Vasilevskiy made a playoff career-high 42 saves to keep Tampa Bay in it, Coleman scored a one-armed, diving buzzer-beater for the winning goal and the Lightning took a two games to none lead in the Stanley Cup Final by beating Montreal 3-1 on Wednesday night.

“Whatever happens win or lose, I’m just trying to go out there and play my best game, and now we’re up two games,” Vasilevskiy said. “It doesn’t matter: up two games, down two games, it’s the same routine, same compete level.”

As defenseman Ryan McDonagh said, “Thankfully, there was one guy that had his level where it needed to be” when the rest of the team did not. The Canadiens outshot Tampa Bay 43-23 and dominated long stretches of play, but they head home for

Games 3 and 4 in Montreal needing to win at least one to avoid being swept by an opponent that can win many different ways.

“The message is, ‘Don’t stop doing what we’ve been doing all playoffs,’ ” said Canadiens veteran winger Corey Perry, who lost to the Lightning in the 2020 final with Dallas. “You continue to play your game, continue to do the things that got you here, you’re going to be successful.”

It was more Montreal’s style of play to give up a ton of shots, rely on Price to bail them out and buckle down with any kind of lead. Days after Lightning coach Jon Cooper said, “Part of our success has been trying not to rely on Vasilevskiy,” they did just that in Game 2 of the Final, and it worked.

Chants of “Va-sy! Va-sy!” from the crowd of 17,166 echoed through Amalie Arena after the Vezina Trophy runner-up made one difficult save after another. No player got a bigger roar during pregame introductions, and he was the focus all night with the Canadiens flinging the puck at him from all angles in a much better performance than the series opener.

“It’s no secret he’s the reason we were still in this game,” Coleman said about Vasilevskiy. “(Then) we made the big plays when it mattered.”

But Tampa Bay showed again why it is the favorite to repeat by taking blow after blow and responding. Missing fourth-leading scorer Alex Killorn because of an injury from Game 1 and with defenseman Mikhail Sergachev and forwards Tyler Johnson and Ross Colton wincing in obvious pain, the Lightning managed to beat Price three times on goals by Anthony Cirelli, Coleman and Ondrej Palat despite the major shot discrepancy.

Cooper said, “Our team game was off.” And Montreal was on.

“I thought we played a pretty solid game all around,” Canadiens captain Shea Weber said. “We did make a couple of mistakes that obviously hurt us.”

Coleman’s goal made all of that moot. With the clock running down at the end of the second, Barclay Goodrow put the puck around Montreal defenseman Ben Chiarot and sent the puck over on a rush to Coleman, who fought off Phillip Danault to bat the puck past Price and put the Lightning up 2-1 at the end of one of their worst periods of the playoffs.

“I knew the clock was winding down,” Coleman said. “I don’t think anybody’s planning to dive anywhere on the ice, but at that time it’s all we had.”

Ganassi’s NASCAR team sold to Trackhouse Racing

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Chip Ganassi sold his NASCAR team to Justin Marks, owner of Trackhouse Racing, and will pull out of the nation’s top stock car series at the end of this season.

Ganassi fields two cars in the Cup Series but will transfer his North Carolina race shop and all its assets to Marks for 2022.

“He made me a great offer that required my attention,” Ganassi told The Associated Press.

“I’m not out of racing, I’m just out of NASCAR,” Ganassi said. “I still have an IndyCar team. I still have an IMSA sports car team. I still have a Formula E team. I had an offer that I was required to consider.”

The sale was announced at the NASCAR Hall of Fame,

where Ganassi said “if I was trying to sell my team, I would have talked to everybody that was looking for a charter or looking for a team or looking to get involved in the sport. I did not. I talked to one person.”

Marks said Trackhouse next year will field two cars, one for Daniel Suarez and one for a driver to be named later.

“It is humbling to know we have secured our position in NASCAR for the next decade. These are never decisions made without a lot of thorough consideration and deep reflection by both parties,” Marks said. “Chip has built an iconic motorsports empire and the Ganassi brand is globally recognized as a winner in the auto racing industry. It is truly an honor that we can build from that foundation.”

Ganassi has been a fixture in motorsports for nearly 40 years dating to his driving days when he qualified for the Indianapolis 500 in 1982.

Chip Ganassi Racing began as an open-wheel team that grew into one of the most successful organizations in IndyCar. The Pittsburgh-based owner expanded into NASCAR in 2001 and has fielded at least two cars every season since.

Ganassi won the Daytona 500 and the Brickyard 400, two of the biggest races in NASCAR, with Jamie McMurray in 2010. He currently fields a pair of Chevrolets for Kurt Busch and Ross Chastain.

Ganassi’s IndyCar team is a four-car program that features six-time series champion Scott Dixon and current points leader

Alex Palou. He will run his organization from its Indianapolis shop next season; the Concord shop will transfer to Marks.

Overall, his teams have 19 championships and more than 230 victories including four in 2021. His win total also includes four Indianapolis 500s, eight Rolex 24 At Daytonas, the 12 Hours of Sebring and 24 Hours of Le Mans. Ganassi’s corporate office is in Pittsburgh.

Marks is in his first season as owner of new team Trackhouse Racing, which counts entertainer Pitbull as a co-owner. The team leased a charter this year from Spire Motorsports to run Suarez but Marks had been unable to finalize a deal to purchase NASCAR’s equivalent of a franchise.

Bulldogs quiet Vanderbilt again for title

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Mississippi State's first national championship had been building since 1985, when "Thunder and Lightning" — Will Clark and Rafael Palmeiro — were the stars on what's known as the best team to not win a College World Series.

The 2021 Bulldogs got the job done. Finally.

Will Bednar and Landon Sims combined on a one-hitter, Mississippi State scored early and built on its lead, and at the end, the Bulldogs were in a dogpile celebrating a 9-0 victory over Vanderbilt in the deciding third game of the College World Series finals Wednesday night.

There to see it was Ron Polk, the godfather of Mississippi State baseball and the

coach of that 1985 team.

"Coach Polk is the one who built this and started it," coach Chris Lemonis said. "We run out there and play in front of the big crowds, but Polk was a big reason why, and our former players, too. This is a lot of years in the making, and a lot of fun. And I know our fans will enjoy this."

Oh, they enjoyed it. It seemed the whole town of Starkville, Miss., was at TD Ameritrade Park — loud and proud — for all three games of the finals.

When third baseman Kamren James threw to first for the final out, the Bulldogs' dugout emptied and about 100 fans jumped out of the stands to celebrate. The players walked the warning track and reached up to high-five the fans.

"I couldn't be more happy for a team, a

town, a fan base, the whole state of Mississippi, except Oxford, of course," SEC player of the year Tanner Allen said. "Those guys are always on my back. So I had to take a shot at them."

"This team overcame everything, man. From getting swept at home in front of 10,000 versus Arkansas to Missouri coming in and taking a series from us and then getting embarrassed at the SEC Tournament. We just kept playing and playing. You blink an eye, we're national champions."

Bednar, working on three days' rest, walked three of the first five batters he faced before retiring 15 in a row. He turned the game over to Sims to start the seventh, and the Commodores broke up the no-hitter when Carter Young singled into center field with one out in the eighth.

Adames, Urias lead Brewers' rout of Cubs

Associated Press

Highly touted Milwaukee prospect Aaron Ashby got hammered for seven runs in the first inning of his big league debut, but Luis Urias homered twice as the Milwaukee Brewers rallied to rout the Chicago Cubs 15-7 Wednesday for their eighth straight win.

The Brewers swept the three-game series and increased their NL Central lead to six games over Chicago. The Cubs lost their sixth in a row.

Willy Adames hit a grand slam during an eight-run burst in the fourth inning that put Milwaukee ahead 14-7. His error at shortstop helped the Cubs break loose at the start against Ashby.

Nationals 15, Rays 6: Trea Turner completed his record-tying third career cycle by hitting a sixth-inning triple for host Washington, accomplishing the feat on his 28th birthday in a defeat of Tampa Bay.

The speedy shortstop became the fifth player in major league history with three cycles, joining Adrian Beltre, Babe Herman, Bob Meusel and John Reilly, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

He also scored four times in the victory, which sealed a two-game sweep as well as Washington's fourth straight win and 14th in its last 17 games.

Angels 11, Yankees 8: Jared Walsh hit a tying grand slam off Aroldis Chapman in a seven-run ninth inning for his second homer of a long night, and Los Angeles won at New York.

Shohei Ohtani's highly anticipated first pitching appearance at Yankee Stadium was a wild wreck that ended early. He was charged with seven runs in the first inning, but the Angels persevered through two weather delays that lasted more than two hours and broke loose for seven of their own in the ninth.

Cardinals 7, Diamondbacks 4: Kwang Hyun Kim won for the first time in 11 starts, pitching five solid innings and helping himself with a two-run double as host St. Louis beat Arizona for a three-game sweep.

Kim (2-5) had lost five straight decisions since his last win on April 23. He stranded six runners through his first four innings, giving up just an RBI single to Asdrúbal Cabrera.

Rockies 6, Pirates 2: Jon Gray tossed six strong innings

and host Colorado beat Pittsburgh.

Garrett Hampson had four hits for the Rockies, who swept the three-game series and improved to 28-16 at home. Colorado is 6-31 on the road.

Tigers 9-7, Indians 4-1: Miguel Cabrera hit his 494th career homer, moving into sole possession of 28th place all-time, and Detroit completed a doubleheader sweep at Cleveland.

Cabrera went 2-for-4 and scored twice in raising his hit total to 2,919, 10 shy of matching Al Simmons for 40th place in baseball history. He broke a tie with Lou Gehrig and Fred McGriff on the homer list with a solo shot off Nick Wittgren in the fifth inning.

Braves 20, Mets 2: Ozzie Albies drove in seven runs with five hits, including two home runs, and host Atlanta battered New York.

Mariners 9, Blue Jays 7 (10): Dylan Moore hit a three-run homer in the 10th inning and Seattle held on for a road win after blowing two earlier leads.

Padres 7, Reds 5: Trent Grisham hit a grand slam and a solo shot and San Diego rallied

for its 11th win in the last 12 games, winning at Cincinnati in a game called in the sixth inning due to rain.

Marlins 11, Phillies 6: Joe Panik made an instant impression in his first game in Miami's lineup, homering in his first at-bat and adding a go-ahead RBI single during a six-run sixth inning in a come-from-behind win at Philadelphia.

Orioles 5, Astros 2: Austin Hays homered and Ryan Mountcastle drove in two runs to help Baltimore wrap up a three-game sweep at slumping Houston.

White Sox 13, Twins 3: Yasmani Grandal hit a three-run shot and a towering two-run drive, and host Chicago went deep six times in a rout of Minnesota.

Athletics 3, Rangers 1: Chris Bassitt pitched three-hit ball over seven scoreless innings to win his ninth straight decision and host Oakland beat Texas.

Red Sox 6, Royals 2: J.D. Martinez and Hunter Renfroe homered, Martin Perez pitched two-run ball into the sixth inning and host Boston beat Kansas City in a game twice delayed by poor weather.