

Guard unit recalls Mideast deployment

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

The 30th Armored Brigade Combat Team deployed to the Middle East in late 2019, expecting to train alongside partner nations and support operations against remnants of Islamic State.

But that changed instantly once they reached Kuwait in October of that year. The National Guard unit did not expect a mission filled with epic flooding and other natural disasters, face-offs with Russian troops or the rush to fan out across the region as tensions with Iran escalated rapidly, brigade officials recalled last week.

The some 5,000 Army National Guard troops who deployed with the brigade, which is headquartered in North Carolina and has subordinate units in South Carolina and West Virginia, faced “challenges of biblical proportions” during the almost yearlong tour, said Col. Charles Morrison, the unit’s commander.

The brigade also had a battalion from the Ohio Army National Guard attached to it during the deployment.

But the 30th Brigade troops eventually spread into 10 additional countries, largely to respond to security crises.

“These guys faced challenges right from the get-go, right when they got on the

ground,” Morrison said. “Originally, when Operation Spartan Shield came to us, this is a deterrence mission [focused] on Iran ... Conditions on the ground kind of changed that focus a little bit as far as the deterrence mission and of course the things that went on.”

From the time that the brigade began preparing for the rotation until it returned home in September 2020, its soldiers saw two major floods and an earthquake, faced off with Russian and Syrian troops and ISIS fighters, and responded to Iranian missile and drone attacks. All of that was followed by the unprecedented global coronavirus pandemic that reached them about mid-tour, Morrison and other brigade officials told reporters Tuesday during a news briefing.

“We even had a plague of locusts in Saudi Arabia with our battalion that was down there,” said Army Maj. Benjamin Bagwell, who was the brigade’s operations officer throughout the deployment. “When [Morrison] says ‘biblical proportions,’ it was like everything but frogs falling from the sky that happened to us during this rotation.”

The brigade faced a flood in Kuwait shortly after deploying, when about a year’s worth of rain fell in 24 hours on the small desert country, Bagwell said.

The challenges were not confined to natural disasters. By the end of the deployment, the brigade would send soldiers to Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan. At any given time during the rotation, about two-thirds of the brigade was outside of Kuwait, Bagwell said, a much busier cycle than most brigades have experience in several years on the Kuwait mission — known as Operation Spartan Shield.

Many of the soldiers found themselves in combat. The brigade awarded 56 Combat Action Badges for soldiers who engaged with enemy forces. It also doled out nearly 2,000 Army Commendation Medals and Army Achievement Medals with combat “C” device, indicating that the awards came in a combat environment, the brigade said.

Since its return to the U.S. in September, Morrison said his brigade has been focused on resetting and is not yet scheduled for another overseas deployment. It is now preparing to field upgraded Abrams tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicle during the next three years.

“We’re really looking forward to that,” the colonel said. “These citizen-soldiers overcame a lot — a lot of it unexpected — during this deployment.”

Sailors take on armed suspects during drills

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Early Tuesday morning, a security forces team, weapons raised, entered the Navy Exchange, searching for a knife-wielding suspect.

The action was a drill using blue, rubber versions of M4 carbines, all part of Citadel Pacific 2021, five days of security-forces exercises this summer at Navy installations across the region.

At Yokosuka, a combination of security teams cleared the

exchange before finding and apprehending someone playing the role of suspect. The teams then moved to a second scenario at Yokosuka Middle School, where they took another roleplaying suspect into custody and discovered a “suspicious” package.

“The importance of these drills is they’re realistic scenarios that allow our patrolmen to get out of the routine patrols and respond to something that doesn’t necessarily happen a lot,” Master-at-Arms Chief Petty Officer Andrew Burnett,

security training chief for the base, said in an interview Tuesday.

Burnett, the antiterrorism training team leader during the exercise, said routine training often involves slideshows or standard drills, but practicing more unique scenarios out in the real world gives security personnel and the base in general wider experience.

“It helps us understand where our training deficiencies are, and it also helps train the public in what might hap-

pen if something were to happen,” he said.

Citadel Pacific, organized by Navy Installations Command and U.S. Pacific Fleet, is being conducted at every naval installation in the theater — Navy Region Japan, Navy Region Hawaii, Navy Region Korea and Joint Region Marianas.

Navy Region Japan held its training from Monday through Friday. Navy Regions Hawaii and Korea will conduct their five-day exercises in August, and Joint Region Marianas will hold its drills in early October.

Italy to require 'green pass' for public venues

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. military personnel may face difficulties obtaining a so-called “green pass” to eat inside restaurants or go to other public venues, under new Italian government rules passed to stem surging numbers of COVID-19 cases and encourage citizens to get vaccinated.

Italy on Thursday approved a plan starting Aug. 6 that requires the pass for those age 12 and over to gain access to a variety of public places, including gyms, movie theaters and pubs. Previously, the pass only was used to ease travel for citizens between EU and Schengen countries.

It wasn't immediately clear from an Italian government statement whether a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention vaccination card would be accepted in lieu of a green pass at venues, though Aviano Air Base indicated it would be in updated guidance Friday.

U.S. Naval Support Activity Naples said Friday in a statement that leadership “is working with our legal team to confirm that the white U.S. CDC vaccination card will serve as proof of vaccination for U.S. service members, DOD civilians and their families out in town.”

“We are also working through the legal implications of this new policy for on-base services,” the statement said.

To be eligible for a green pass, people must prove they have received at least one vaccine dose in the last nine months, recovered from COVID-19 in the last six months or tested negative in the previous 48 hours, The Associated Press reported Thursday.

The certification is needed to “to keep economic activity open” and will allow people to enjoy entertainment “with the assurance they won't be next to contagious people,” said Prime Minister Mario Draghi, according to the AP report.

The U.S. and Italian embassies have verified that a CDC vaccination card would be accepted as proof of vaccination for travel, NSA Naples said in a Facebook post earlier this month.

The card is an “officially recognized substitution for the EU Digital Certificate when traveling within Italy,” the post said.

It's not certain if U.S. citizens living in Italy would be eligible for a green pass if they were vaccinated on base or in America.

It's also unclear how the pass requirement will affect international travelers once they arrive. Many are expected to flock to Italy during August, which is the traditional tourist season for much of Europe.

Italian authorities also haven't yet discussed publicly how merchants will be expected to check the passes. Diners would still be able to eat outdoors without the passes under the rules.

Bases in Japan offer Olympics viewing options

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The gates to Olympic venues in Tokyo may be closed to spectators, but U.S. military installations in Japan are hosting events where fans may find camaraderie while cheering on U.S. Olympians.

Yokota, home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo, plans an Olympic Salute on July 29 and 30 at the Sakura Shell. At Yokosuka Naval Base, homeport of the 7th Fleet, the USO is warming up its 85-inch TV for Olympic viewing, with theater-style seating, in its newly renovated facility.

Over a dozen active-duty service members are competing in this year's Olympic events, including shooting, modern pentathlon, boxing, wrestling, track and field and sailing.

For Olympic binge-watchers, American Forces Network is providing NBC's game coverage on its sports channels, according to Defense Media Activity. NBC plans more than 7,000 hours of Olympics content before the closing ceremonies Aug. 8.

For fans without an AFN subscription, online streaming of the games is available for free for service members and Defense Department employees who have Shop My Exchange accounts.

Bonhomme Richard blaze leads to fire-safety checks

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Navy has hired a cadre of fire marshals to evaluate fire-fighting training and protocols in ports and shipyards in response to the devastating fire last year aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard, the commander of Naval Surface Forces said Thursday.

“They're out there, ensuring that the waterfront mainte-

nance people, along with the private contractor, and the ship's crew are doing their proper safety inspection,” Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener said during a conference call with reporters.

The amphibious assault ship was undergoing maintenance at Naval Base San Diego when it caught fire July 12, 2020. The blaze seared through 11 of the ship's 14 decks, destroyed its

forward mast and damaged the superstructure before being put out four days later.

More than 60 sailors and civilians were treated for minor injuries, such as smoke inhalation.

Kitchener was asked Thursday what changes the Navy had made, even as the investigations remain in flux. The service first reviewed fire-safety compliance at all levels, from

ships to regional maintenance centers, he said.

“We went through and we found that, in some cases, maybe we weren't doing as well as we should,” he said. “We're pretty good at firefighting at sea and all those procedures, but when we got to the industrial environment it was, OK, looks like we need to kind of make sure there's a little bit of education.”

Europe's tourism dimmed by virus spike

Associated Press

LONDON — Chaos and confusion over travel rules and measures to contain new virus outbreaks are contributing to another cruel summer for Europe's battered tourism industry.

Popular destination countries are grappling with surging COVID-19 variants, but the patchwork and last-minute nature of the efforts as the peak season gets underway threatens to derail another summer.

In France, the world's most visited country, visitors to cultural and tourist sites were confronted last week with a new re-

quirement for a special COVID-19 pass.

To get the pass, which comes in paper or digital form, people must prove they're either fully vaccinated or recently recovered from an infection, or produce a negative virus test. Use of the pass could extend next month to restaurants and cafes.

Italy said Thursday that people will need a similar pass to access museums and movie theaters, dine inside restaurants and cafes, and get into pools, casinos and a range of other venues.

At the Eiffel Tower, unprepared tourists lined up for quick

virus tests so they could get the pass to visit the Paris landmark. Johnny Nielsen, visiting from Denmark with his wife and two children, questioned the usefulness of the French rules.

"If I get tested now, I can go but then I (could) get corona in the queue right here," Nielsen said, though he added they wouldn't change their plans because of it.

Europe's vital travel and tourism industry is desperate to make up after a disastrous 2020. International tourist arrivals to Europe last year plunged by nearly 70%, and for the first five months of this year, they're

down 85%, according to U.N. World Tourism Organization figures.

American, Japanese and Chinese travelers aren't confident it will be possible to visit and move freely within Europe, the European Travel Commission said. International arrivals are forecast to remain at nearly half their 2019 level this year, though domestic demand will help make up the shortfall.

The United Kingdom's statistics office suspended its monthly international passenger data, because it said there aren't enough people arriving "to provide robust estimates."

States scale back reporting as coronavirus cases surge

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Several states scaled back their reporting of COVID-19 statistics this month just as cases across the country started to skyrocket, depriving the public of real-time information on outbreaks, cases, hospitalizations and deaths in their communities.

The shift to weekly instead of daily reporting in Florida, Nebraska, Iowa and South Dakota marked a notable shift during a pandemic in which coronavirus dashboards have become a staple for Americans closely tracking case counts and trends to navigate a crisis that has killed more than 600,000 people in the United States.

In Nebraska, the state actually stopped reporting on the virus altogether for two weeks after Gov. Pete Ricketts declared an end to the official virus emergency, forcing news reporters to file public records requests or turn to national websites that track state data to learn about COVID statistics. The state backtracked two weeks later and came up with a weekly site that provides some basic numbers.

When Florida changed the frequency of its virus reporting earlier this month, officials said it made sense given the decreasing number of cases and the increasing number of people being vaccinated.

In Florida's last two weekly reports, the number of new cases shot up from 23,000 to 45,000 and then 73,000 on Friday, an average of more than 10,000 per day. Hospitals are starting to run out of space in parts of the state.

The trend of reducing data reporting has alarmed infectious disease specialists who believe that more information is better during a pandemic. People have come to rely on state virus dashboards to help make decisions about whether to attend large gatherings or wear masks in public, and understanding the level of risk in the community affects how people respond to virus restrictions and calls to get vaccinated.

But reporting the numbers on a weekly basis still allows people to see the overall trends while smoothing out some of the day-to-day variations that come from the way cases are reported and not the actual number of new cases.

Blazes lash Calif. homes, West

Associated Press

INDIAN FALLS, Calif. — Flames racing through rugged terrain in Northern California destroyed multiple homes Saturday as the state's largest wildfire intensified and numerous other blazes battered the West.

The Dixie fire, which started July 14, had already leveled over a dozen houses and other structures when it tore through the tiny community of Indian Falls after dark.

An updated damage estimate was not immediately available, though fire officials said the blaze has charred more than 181,000 acres in Plumas and Butte counties and was 20% contained.

The fire was burning in a remote area with limited access, hampering firefighters' efforts as it charged eastward, fire officials said. It has prompted evacuation orders in several small communities and along the west shore of Lake Almanor, a popular area getaway.

Meanwhile, the nation's largest wildfire, southern Oregon's Bootleg fire, was nearly halfway surrounded Saturday as more than 2,200 crew members worked to corral it in the

heat and wind, fire officials said. The growth of the sprawling blaze had slowed, but thousands of homes remained threatened on its eastern side, authorities said.

"This fire is resistant to stopping at dozer lines," Jim Hanson, fire behavior analyst, said in a news release from the Oregon Department of Forestry. "With the critically dry weather and fuels we are experiencing, firefighters are having to constantly reevaluate their control lines and look for contingency options."

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency for four northern counties because of wildfires that he said were causing "conditions of extreme peril to the safety of persons and property." The proclamation opened the way for more state support.

On Saturday, fire crews from California and Utah headed to Montana, Gov. Greg Gianforte announced. Five firefighters were injured Thursday when swirling winds blew flames back on them as they worked on the Devil's Creek fire burning in rough, steep terrain near the rural town of Jordan, in the northeast part of the state.

Iraqi PM: US combat troops not necessary

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's prime minister says his country no longer requires American combat troops to fight Islamic State, but a formal time frame for their redeployment will depend on the outcome of talks with U.S. officials this week.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi said Iraq will still ask for U.S. training and military intelligence gathering. His comments came in an exclusive interview with The Associated Press ahead of a planned trip to Washington, where he's slated to meet with President Joe Biden on Monday for a fourth round of strategic talks.

"There is no need for any foreign combat forces on Iraqi soil," said al-Kadhimi, falling

short of announcing a deadline for a U.S. troop departure. Iraq's security forces and army are capable of defending the country without U.S.-led coalition troops, he said.

But al-Kadhimi said any withdrawal schedule would be based on the needs of Iraqi forces, who have shown themselves capable in the last year of conducting independent anti-ISIS missions.

"The war against IS and the readiness of our forces requires a special timetable, and this depends on the negotiations that we will conduct in Washington," he said.

The U.S. and Iraq agreed in April that the U.S. transition to a train-and-advise mission meant the U.S. combat role would end

but they didn't settle on a timetable for completing that transition. In Monday's meeting at the White House, the two leaders are expected to specify a timeline, possibly by the end of this year.

The U.S. troop presence has stood at about 2,500 since late last year when former President Donald Trump ordered a reduction from 3,000.

"What we want from the U.S. presence in Iraq is to support our forces in training and developing their efficiency and capabilities, and in security cooperation," al-Kadhimi said.

Al-Kadhimi has faced significant pressure from mainly Shiite political parties to announce a timeline for a U.S. troop withdrawal. Ongoing rocket and,

more recently, drone attacks targeting the American military presence have also heaped pressure on the government. They are widely believed to be perpetrated by Iran-aligned Iraqi militia groups.

Shiite parties have said they do not object to trainers or advisers who may remain as part of the coalition.

U.S. and coalition officials have maintained that U.S. troops are no longer accompanying Iraqi forces on ground missions and that coalition assistance is limited to intelligence gathering and surveillance and the deployment of advanced military technologies. Iraqi military officials have stressed they still need this support going forward.

Warnings came too late for flood-struck German residents

Associated Press

AHRWEILER, Germany — Like other residents of his town in Germany, Wolfgang Huste knew a flood was coming. What nobody told him, he says, was how bad it would be.

The 66-year-old antiquarian bookseller from Ahrweiler said the first serious warning to evacuate or move to higher floors of buildings close to the Ahr River came through loudspeaker announcements around 8 p.m. on July 14. Huste then heard a short emergency siren blast and church bells ringing, followed by silence.

"It was spooky, like in a horror film," he said.

Huste rushed to rescue his car from an underground garage. By the time he parked it on the street, the water stood knee height. Five minutes later, safely indoors, he saw his vehicle floating down the street. He estimates the losses in his store, where books dating back to the early 1500s were destroyed, at more than \$235,000.

"The warning time was far too short," Huste said.

With the confirmed death toll from the floods earlier this month in Germany and neighboring countries passing 210, almost

150 people still missing and the economic cost expected to run into the billions, many have asked why the emergency systems designed to warn people of impending disaster didn't work.

Sirens in some towns failed when the electricity was cut. In other locations, there were no sirens at all; volunteer firefighters had to knock on people's doors to tell them what to do. The German weekly Der Spiegel reported that in one suburb of Wuppertal, north of Cologne, people were warned by a monk ringing a bell.

Huste acknowledged that few could have predicted the speed with which the water would rise and rip through towns. But he pointed across the valley to a building that houses Germany's Federal Office for Civil Protection, where first responders from across the country train for possible disasters.

German authorities did receive early warnings from the European Flood Awareness System. These made their way through official channels, putting firefighters on heightened alert as well as smartphone users who had installed disaster warning apps, but such apps aren't widely used.

Fires force evacuations on Sardinia island

Associated Press

MILAN — Fires raged Sunday on Italy's Mediterranean island of Sardinia, where nearly 400 people were evacuated overnight. No deaths or injuries have been reported.

Firefighters said several homes were damaged in the island's western interior region. Civil protection authorities said a preliminary survey indicates 10,000 acres have been consumed by flames around Montiferu, near the center of the Italy's second-largest island.

Authorities evacuated 200 people from the town of Cuglieri overnight and another 155 from Sennariolo, where flames, according to the mayor, still had not reached residential areas. More than half of those evacuated in Cuglieri were allowed to return home Sunday, the news agency ANSA reported.

Eleven aircraft were working to put out the flames, the head of the island's civil protection agency, Antonio Belloi, told ANSA.

Efforts were being hampered by hot southwesterly winds, putting the fire danger level at "extreme."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Cocaine disguised as cake seized from vehicle

ME WINSLOW — A New York man and a Maine woman are facing charges over cocaine disguised as a cake that was seized from their vehicle, the Maine Drug Enforcement Agency said.

Acting on a tip, police stopped the car on Interstate 295 in Gardiner, and a drug-sniffing dog found 4 pounds of cocaine worth \$200,000 on the street, the MDEA said. Also seized was \$1,900 in cash.

About 2 pounds of the cocaine was disguised as a marble cake with coffee grounds used to cover up the scent, officials said.

CEO took money from firm that feeds poor kids

GA WOODBINE — The director of an organization that feeds poor children during the summer in coastal Georgia stole from the state by saying she provided meals that were never made, investigators said.

Dawn Eggleston, CEO of Our Daily Bread Inc., was indicted on two charges this month in Camden County, according to court papers.

In 2017, inspectors were called after the state agency responsible for the summer meals suspected Eggleston was lying about how many meals Our Daily Bread was providing throughout south Georgia, the state Inspector General's Office said in a news release.

Later that year Eggleston asked the state to pay her \$831,000 for meals, some of which were never provided, investigators said.

Truck driver crashes into manure truck

FL MELBOURNE — It was a smelly situation in central Florida after a crash involving a tractor trailer and a dump truck left cow manure over a portion of Interstate 95.

The Florida Highway Patrol said in a tweet that the crash happened in the northbound lanes near mile marker 198. Traffic was diverted until the manure was cleaned up.

No one was injured in the crash, according to Brevard County Fire Rescue.

\$180K bid snags medal from 1st modern Games

MA BOSTON — A rare first-place medal from the first modern Olympic Games sold for more than \$180,000.

Boston-based RR Auction said the winning bidder for the silver medal from the 1896 games in Athens, Greece, was a collector based on the East Coast.

At the inaugural Olympiad, first-place winners were awarded silver medals and second-place finishers earned bronze, the auction house said. There was no award for placing third.

Man arrested after firing gun at helicopter

CA OAK VIEW — Authorities arrested a man after they said he fired gunshots at a California fire-fighting helicopter during nighttime training exercises.

No one aboard Ventura County Firehawk Copter 4 was injured, and the aircraft was not

struck, according to the Ventura County Sheriff's Office.

The suspect, Joshua Chimarusti, 44, was booked on suspicion of attempted murder and several firearms offenses.

While flying in Lake Casitas for training operations, the helicopter crew realized there was gunfire aimed at them, and the pilot took evasive actions and saw a vehicle speeding away.

The helicopter followed the vehicle to the community of Oak View until it stopped, and Chimarusti got out and fired more shots at the chopper, authorities said.

'Barney' the bull eludes capture days after escape

NY MASTIC — An escaped bull has eluded capture for several days on Long Island despite searchers employing a helicopter and night-vision equipment along with attempts to lure the roaming animal with grain and a cow.

Police in Suffolk County said they began responding to calls about the 1,500-pound bull running loose after it broke through the fence of a local farm. Residents have spotted the dark-coated bull, since nicknamed Barney, walking across fields, roads and suburban front yards. And it briefly shut down a portion of Sunrise Highway.

A "bull trap" baited with the same feed Barney eats on the farm did not work, nor did other would-be traps.

Man convicted of using shoplifters in resale plot

WV CHARLESTON — A West Virginia man was convicted of organiz-

ing a network of shoplifters, many of them addicted to drugs, to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars in store merchandise that he then resold on the internet.

A federal jury convicted Neldtcho Vladimirov of Cross Lanes of three counts of money laundering and one conspiracy count after a three-day trial in Charleston, the U.S. attorney's office for the southern district of West Virginia said in a statement.

Evidence at the trial showed Vladimirov acquired stolen goods and resold them for profit to unsuspecting buyers. Vladimirov paid a fraction of the stolen items' worth, and many of the shoplifters used the cash to support their drug habits.

Helicopter rescues man harassed by bear

AK NOME — A miner who said he was harassed by a bear for seven straight nights in the tundra near Nome was rescued when a passing Coast Guard helicopter spotted the SOS on top of his cabin.

The man, who was not identified by the Coast Guard in a statement, was taken to waiting rescue personnel in Nome.

The helicopter crew was flying from Kotzebue to Kodiak when it saw the SOS sign on top of the building.

The man requested medical assistance after the helicopter landed, saying he had been attacked by a bear a few days earlier.

The man appeared to have a leg injury and bruising on his torso, the Coast Guard said.

— From wire reports



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US swimmers manage fine without Phelps

Associated Press

TOKYO — Michael Phelps was up in his broadcast seat, a mere observer rather than the driving force of U.S. swimming.

No need to fret about what he left behind.

The Americans are off to a flying start at the Tokyo Aquatics Centre.

Displaying their trademark depth, the U.S. earned six of 12 medals Sunday on the first morning of finals, showing no signs of slipping even without the most decorated athlete in Olympic history.

From Chase Kalisz's gold in the 400-meter individual medley to Kieran Smith pulling out a bronze in his first major international competition, there was plenty of red, white and blue on the medal podium in the largely empty arena.

"We were in the warmup pool seeing people get a gold medal, get second, get second and third. It was crazy," said Abbey Weitzeil, who was part of the 4x100-meter freestyle relay team that claimed a bronze in the final event of the session. "It just fired us up and got us really excited."

Kalisz got things rolling with his victory in the grueling medley, making up for a second-place showing at the 2016 Rio Games. Jay Litherland rallied on the final leg to give the Americans a 1-2 finish that set the tone for the rest of the morning.

"I really kind of do feel like I let the U.S. down in '16 even though I swam a lot faster than here," Kalisz said. "The USA has a

proud legacy of the 400 IM — (Tom) Dolan, Phelps, (Ryan) Lochte. This was my redemption story."

At 27, he knew it might be his last chance to win the race that includes all four strokes, especially after being forced to wait an extra year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was tough last year with the Olympics kind of getting pulled out from under us and really having so much uncertainty whether it was going to happen," Kalisz said. "Five years of preparation for this one moment, and it's not like I was getting any younger."

Kalisz and Litherland caught a huge break when home-country favorite Daiya Seto shockingly failed to advance from the preliminaries, making a huge strategic error by attempting to conserve his energy for the final.

The Americans took advantage. Kalisz pulled away on the breaststroke, his best leg, and Litherland rallied on the closing freestyle to claim the second spot.

Turns out, the Americans were just getting started.

Smith, who emerged from obscurity with a breakthrough performance at the U.S. trials last month, proved he was no fluke by finishing third in the 400 free behind Tunisia's Ahmed Hafnaoui and Australia's Jack McLoughlin.

"I sprinted my butt off the last 50 like it was a 50 free," Smith said. "It was a really

fun race."

Japan's Yui Ohashi took gold in the women's 400 IM — making up a bit for Seto's flop — but two Americans were right on her heels.

Olympic rookie Emma Weyant grabbed the silver, while 27-year-old Hali Flickinger took bronze for her first career medal.

"After we saw (Kalisz and Litherland win medals), we kind of looked at each other and said, 'It's our turn,'" Weyant said. "I think that really got our team going."

They weren't done, either.

While no one had any chance of beating the mighty Aussies in the 4x100 free relay — indeed, they set the first swimming world record of these games — a quartet anchored by Simone Manuel managed to hang on for third.

Katie Ledecky was among those pumped up by the American performance.

Before she swam for the first time in the evening preliminaries of the 400 free, Ledecky's Olympic Village roommates — Manuel, Flickinger and relay swimmers Allison Schmitt and Natalie Hinds — had already set quite a high bar.

"I can definitely feel the energy," said Ledecky, a five-time gold medalist and expected to be one of the biggest U.S. stars in Tokyo. "Our whole apartment has something like four medals already. We're just really excited and really enjoying the experience with each other."

Russian gymnasts ahead of US after qualifying

Associated Press

TOKYO — The trouble started early. A step out of bounds on floor exercise here. A short landing there.

Over the course of two hours on Sunday, the mistakes — some almost imperceptible, some laid bare for the world to see — kept piling up, chipping away at the aura USA Gymnastics has built over the past decade. Not even the greatest of all time was immune to the realities of a sport where perfection is unattainable.

For 11 years, the Americans flirted with it, at least from a competitive standpoint, flying all over the globe, then flying back home with their suitcases stuffed with gold.

It still might happen at the Tokyo Olympics. But for the first time in a long time, it appears it won't happen without a fight.

Russia pulled off a stunner in qualifying, posting a top score of 171.629, more than a full point ahead of the U.S. total 170.562. While reigning Olympic champion Simone Biles topped the all-around with teammate Sunisa Lee close behind in third, the Americans ended their session looking up at another name on the scoreboard in the team standings for the first time since the 2010 world championships.

"This was not the finals," U.S. high-performance director Tom Forster said. "This was getting into the finals. So this might be a

great awakening for us and we'll take advantage of it."

China, France, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy and host Japan also advanced to Tuesday night's final. Olympic legend Oksana Chusovitina's journey is over. The 46-year-old from Uzbekistan did not qualify during the vault final at her record eighth Olympics.

Athletes, judges and administrators rose to their feet to salute Chusovitina as she made her way off the floor. She waved to the crowd with tears in her eyes before posing for pictures with whoever wanted one.

"I'm saying goodbye to sports," Chusovitina said. "It's kind of mixed feelings. I'm alive, I'm happy, I'm here without any inju-

ries, and I can stand on my own."

Something the Americans have done in the team competition for 10 years. After going largely unchallenged over two Olympic quads, they suddenly have company.

Forster raised eyebrows following the Olympic Trials last month when he said taking the top four finishers in the all-around in rank over a squad that could potentially score a bit higher by taking a specialist didn't matter. He reasoned sacrificing a tenth or two here or there wasn't going to matter based on the history of blowout wins by the Americans at world championships since he took over in 2018.

France ends US Olympic win streak at 25

Associated Press

SAITAMA, Japan — For the first time since 2004, the U.S. men's basketball team has lost in the Olympics. And the Americans' quest for a fourth consecutive gold medal is already in serious trouble.

France — the team that knocked the Americans out of contention in the Basketball World Cup two years ago — dealt the U.S. a major blow once again. Evan Fournier's three-pointer with just under a minute left put France ahead to stay in what became a 83-76 win over the Americans on Sunday in the opening game for both teams at the Tokyo Olympics.

The U.S. had won 25 consecutive Olympic games, last losing at the Athens Games 17 years ago and settling for a bronze medal there.

"I think that's a little bit of hubris if you think the Americans are supposed to just roll out the balls and win," U.S. coach Gregg Popovich said. "We've got to work for it just like everybody else. And for those 40 minutes, they played better than we did."

Fournier had 28 points for France, while

Rudy Gobert scored 14 and Nando de Colo had 13. Jrue Holiday had 18 points for the U.S., Bam Adebayo had 12, Damian Lillard 11 and Kevin Durant had 10 for the Americans — who are just 2-3 in their games this summer, the first four of them exhibitions in Las Vegas that weren't supposed to mean much.

The Olympics, they were supposed to be different.

They weren't. Going back to the World Cup in China two years ago, the Americans are 3-5 in their last eight games with NBA players in the lineup.

"I mean, it's great," Gobert said. "But until we have what we want to have around our neck, it doesn't really matter."

The idea of anyone else leaving an Olympics with gold hasn't been all that realistic in recent years. Now, it's very real.

A 10-point U.S. lead in the third quarter was wasted, and so was a 12-point barrage from Holiday in the opening 4½ minutes of the fourth quarter as the Americans went from six points down to start the period to six points up with 5:23 remaining.

The lead was seven with 3:30 left. France outscored the U.S. 16-2 from there, and the Americans missed all nine of their shots — five of them in a 21-second span on the same trip down the floor in the final minute, three of those from three-point range.

The dagger came off a broken play; Guerchon Yabusele dove to save a ball from going out of bounds on the French offensive end, flailing and slapping it to Fournier. He caught the ball in front of the U.S. bench and made a three-pointer that put France up for good with 57 seconds remaining.

"Evan was amazing," France coach Vincent Collet said. "I don't want to use big, big words, but he made some very big shots."

The loss doesn't knock the U.S. out of medal contention, but it essentially eliminates the margin for error. The Americans play Iran on Wednesday and then the Czech Republic on Saturday in its final two Group A games; win both of those, and the U.S. will be in the quarterfinals. Lose another one, and the Americans might not even finish in the top eight of this 12-team tournament.

US beats Australia, will face Japan for softball gold

Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan — The United States had just given up its first run and was two outs away from losing for the first time in the Olympic softball tournament.

Amanda Chidester stepped up to the plate with two runners on and slapped the ball into left field.

"In my head, I'm like: Score! Score two! Score two! Score two!" she recalled. "When I got up and everyone was running out at me, I was like, We did it!"

Pinch-runner Ally Carda and Haylie McCleney came across the plate on Chidester's eighth-inning single, giving the United States a pulsating 2-1 victory over Australia on Sunday and a rematch with defending champion Japan in Tuesday's gold medal game.

Monica Abbott (2-0) struck out 13 and threw a three-hitter in a 126-pitch complete game, giving up an unearned run when

Jade Wall walked on eight pitches with the bases loaded in the top of the eighth to force home the automatic runner.

With pinch-runner Ally Carda on second as the automatic runner in the bottom half, leadoff hitter McCleney reached against Tarni Stepto (0-1) with an infield single on a 1-0 pitch. McCleney hit a two-hopper to shortstop Clare Warwick, who set her feet before throwing, allowing McCleney to get on base for the fourth time in the game. She is batting .727 (8-for-11) and has reached 13 times in 15 plate appearances.

Janie Reed, the wife of major league reliever Jake Reed, sacrificed for the fourth time in the tournament, putting runners at second and third.

"Give me a strike, and I'm going for it," Chidester recalled thinking to herself.

She swung at a pitch on the outer half of the plate and singled sharply past a diving War-

wick. Wall picked up the ball two steps onto the outfield grass and heaved it home, but first baseman Taylah Tsitsikorinis cut off the throw as Carda and McCleney scored standing up.

Chidester slid into second, taking the extra base just in case a runner ahead of her was thrown out. When she popped up, she saw teammates running onto the field to celebrate.

"Wow! Incredible softball," Abbott said. "A lot of tense moments. But you live for these moments. You like to compete in these moments."

Abbott walked six batters, two of them intentionally. She has a 0.00 ERA and two saves, allowing four hits in 17 innings with 28 strikeouts and nine walks. Abbott improved to 5-0 in her Olympic career.

After scoring just seven runs in four games, the U.S. and Japan (both 4-0) play on Monday in a matchup that will determine only which team bats last in the

gold medal game, the fifth straight for the Americans have reached.

"We've got Fire and Ice throwing for us right now, and they're throwing the ball really, really well," U.S. coach Ken Eriksen said, referring to his nicknames for Abbott and Cat Osterman.

Abbott escaped a bases-loaded jam in the sixth.

Australia went ahead in the eighth after automatic runner Belinda White took third on Leigh Godfrey's sacrifice. Stacey Porter was intentionally walked for the second time, Taylah Tsitsikorinis walked, Chelsea Forkin took a called third strike and Wall fouled off a pair of 3-2 pitches before taking an inside pitch. She has driven in three of Australia's four runs in the tournament.

McCleney's first-inning triple was wasted as the U.S. went 0-for-6 with runners in scoring position before the eighth, dropping to 3-for-31 in the Olympics.

Angels' Sandoval loses no-hitter in 9th

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Patrick Sandoval knew history was within his grasp. The young Los Angeles Angels left-hander looked up at the scoreboard after every inning to confirm his work: no hits allowed.

His teammates also let him know what was at stake, by staying as far away from him as possible in the dugout.

In charge the whole way, Sandoval had his no-hit bid broken up with one out in the ninth inning on a soft double by rookie Brent Rooker as the Angels beat the Minnesota Twins 2-1 Saturday night.

"All of a sudden, I got shunned," Sandoval said. "After the seventh, I came in and I was like, 'Everyone is really far away from me.'"

Sandoval, a 24-year-old who began the game with a 3-13 career record, struck out a career-high 13. He was vying for the 12th no-hitter in Angels history — Nolan Ryan threw four of his record seven no-hitters for them.

There have already been seven no-hitters in the majors this season. The big-league record of eight was set in 1884, the first year overhand pitching was permitted.

The Twins hadn't come close to a hit until Rooker, who fanned his first three times up, flared an opposite-field fly that fell just inside the line in right.

"Definitely one that I needed, one the team needed," Rooker said. "That guy obviously did a really good job all night executing pitches. Obviously not my best swing, but it ended up working out. Just something I needed to fall."

Sandoval (3-4) smiled after the ball fell, retired the next batter and then was pulled after 108 pitches. He walked one and hit two.

Astros 4, Rangers 1: Framber Valdez and the Houston bullpen took a no-hit try into the eighth inning and the Astros sent visiting Texas to its season-worst 11th straight loss.

Isiah Kiner-Falefa hit a leadoff single against reliever Ryne Stanek in the eighth. Center fielder Myles Straw sprinted in and made a diving attempt to catch the ball, but it bounced just in front of his glove.

The Rangers have already been no-hit twice this season, by Joe Musgrove of the San Diego Padres on April 9 and Corey Kluber of the New York Yankees on May 19.

Yankees 4, Red Sox 3: Rougned Odor's two-run double highlighted a four-run ral-

ly in the eighth inning after his two errors helped host Boston build an early lead, and New York beat the Red Sox.

Gleyber Torres added a go-ahead, bloop single for the Yankees. They are 3-9 this season against their longtime rivals.

Boston, which had won four in a row, put runners on second and third with two outs in the ninth before Aroldis Chapman struck out Kiké Hernández for his 18th save.

Rays 8, Indians 2: Austin Meadows hit a pair of two-run homers, Ji-Man Choi had three RBIs and visiting Tampa Bay beat Cleveland for the 11th straight time.

The Rays moved into a first-place tie with Boston in the AL East.

Meadows, Choi and Brett Phillips each homered in the first three innings to help Tampa Bay build a 4-1 lead against J.C. Mejia (1-6). Choi also drove in runs in the seventh and ninth, and Meadows hit his second two-run shot in the ninth.

Dodgers 1, Rockies 0: Austin Barnes homered early, Kenley Jansen preserved the lead late and host Los Angeles beat Colorado to snap a three-game losing streak.

Jansen had blown saves against San Francisco on Wednesday and Thursday, but pitched a scoreless ninth for his 22nd save in 26 opportunities.

Barnes connected on a slider from Kyle Freeland (1-5) and drove it into the left field stands in the second inning.

Diamondbacks 7, Cubs 2: Daulton Varsho homered in his third straight game and hit a tiebreaking single in a three-run seventh inning, leading visiting Arizona past Chicago.

The teams waited out a 1-hour, 39-minute rain delay after the top of the ninth. By then, the Cubs were well on their way to their 18th loss in 24 games.

Orioles 5, Nationals 3: Matt Harvey allowed one hit in six scoreless innings in another outstanding performance and host Baltimore beat fading Washington.

Harvey (5-10) allowed only one baserunner on a Trea Turner double in the fourth. The right-hander struck out four.

Mariners 5, Athletics 4: Struggling rookie Jarred Kelenic scored the winning run on a Lou Trivino's wild pitch in the bottom of the ninth, Mitch Haniger homered twice and host Seattle beat Oakland.

It was the second game in a row the Mariners have won on a wild pitch. They are a major league-best 22-8 in one-run games this season and have won eight of

their last 12.

Marlins 3, Padres 2: Fernando Tatis Jr. hit his NL-leading 30th homer for an early lead, but host Miami rallied late to beat San Diego,

Jesús Aguilar lined a go-ahead, two-run single to center with one out in the seventh inning after reliever Tim Hill (5-5) walked pinch hitter Sandy León and allowed consecutive singles to Miguel Rojas and Starling Marte.

Braves 15, Phillies 3: Freddie Freeman, Abraham Almonte, Ozzie Albies, Austin Riley and Joc Pederson homered to lead visiting Atlanta past Philadelphia.

The Braves moved back into a tie for second place in the National League East with the Phillies at 48-49.

Brewers 6, White Sox 1: Rowdy Tellez hit his first two homers as a Brewer, Corbin Burnes pitched six strong innings and host Milwaukee beat Chicago.

Tellez went 3-for-4 with three RBIs, with solo shots off José Ruiz in the sixth inning and Reynaldo López in the eighth. The Brewers acquired the slugging first baseman from Toronto on July 6.

Reds 5, Cardinals 3: Jesse Winker homered, doubled and drove in four runs, Luis Castillo pitched seven effective innings and host Cincinnati beat St. Louis.

Joey Votto also homered to help the Reds overcome three errors and extend their winning streak against the Cardinals to six games.

Pirates 10, Giants 2: Gregory Polanco homered, drove in three runs and scored twice, and Kevin Newman matched his career high with four hits in visiting Pittsburgh's victory over NL West-leading San Francisco.

Polanco lofted a sacrifice fly in the first inning, hit an RBI single in the third and hit his 11th homer in the fifth, all against Kevin Gausman (9-4).

Royals 9, Tigers 8: Salvador Perez and Carlos Santana hit three-run homers in host Kansas City's comeback victory over Detroit.

Perez hit his 23rd home run of the season to highlight a four-run fourth. Santana gave the Royals the lead with a three-run homer to right in a five-run seventh.

Blue Jays 10, Mets 3: All-Star Teoscar Hernández hit two of Toronto's five home runs and the visiting Blue Jays beat New York to stop a three-game losing streak.

George Springer, Marcus Semien and Bo Bichette also homered for Toronto.