

US looks to reorient military posture

By **CHAD GARLAND**

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. is cutting air defense systems and force levels in the Middle East as the Biden administration realigns its military posture to focus on countering China and Russia.

Cmdr. Jessica L. McNulty, a Pentagon spokesperson, confirmed the plans but would not provide specific details, after the Wall Street Journal reported Friday that eight Patriot antimissile batteries were being withdrawn from countries including Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

A Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, or THAAD, was also being pulled from Saudi Arabia, and fighter jet squadrons were being reduced, unnamed administration officials told the newspaper. Troops were also being reduced in Iraq, where the U.S. already cut its presence in half to 2,500 early this year, the report said.

"The Secretary of Defense directed the Commander of U.S. Central Command to remove from the region this summer certain forces and capabilities, primarily air defense assets," McNulty said in an email to Stars and Stripes on Saturday. "Some of

these assets returned to the United States for much needed maintenance and repair. Some of them will be deployed to other regions."

The Pentagon is focused on making sure the high-demand assets are ready in case of a contingency, she said. Citing coordination with regional partners and operational security concerns, she said the Pentagon would not provide details on locations, dispositions or timelines of the withdrawals.

But officials told the Journal the reductions began earlier this month and are mostly coming from Saudi Arabia. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin informed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of the drawdown in a June 2 phone call, officials told the paper.

The realignment of forces comes as the U.S. continues to wind down its two-decade war in Afghanistan and seeks to shift its military focus from counterinsurgency to competing powerful rivals, mainly China.

Iran-backed militias continue to pose a threat to U.S. forces in Iraq, where they have been blamed for dozens of rocket attacks targeting bases housing American troops and contractors. In recent months, the militias

appear to have shifted to using small, low-flying drones armed with explosives in both Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

The Patriot batteries capable of shooting down ballistic missiles do not provide defenses against the small rockets or drones, but counter-rocket, artillery and mortar systems, or C-RAMs, deployed to protect the antimissile systems are capable of shooting down what have typically been barrages of Katyusha rockets fired from makeshift truck or ground launchers.

McNulty did not respond to a question about whether the C-RAMs would remain in place in Iraq, or what the U.S. is doing to bolster its defenses against the small drones.

The Pentagon is confident its drawdown won't negatively impact national security interests in the region, where the U.S. commitment is evident from its range of partnership activities, such as intelligence sharing, security assistance and foreign military sales, McNulty told Stars and Stripes.

"We maintain a robust force posture in the region appropriate to the threat," she said. "We also retain the flexibility to rapidly flow forces back into the Middle East as conditions warrant."

Study: Side effect skepticism led to vaccine hesitancy

By **WYATT OLSON**

Stars and Stripes

Medical workers and the young were most hesitant to be vaccinated against the coronavirus during the early stages of the vaccine rollout, primarily over concerns of short- and long-term side effects, a study that surveyed personnel at an Air Force base found.

Researchers analyzed responses from 816 people — uniformed, retirees and civilian contractors — associated with Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio about their likelihood of getting vaccinated, according to the study published June 12 in the journal *Military Medicine*.

The voluntary survey began in November, a month before the Food and Drug Administration issued its first emergency use authorization for a vaccine. The survey con-

cluded in February.

"In a setting where COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory, we found that the majority of individuals working at a military [base] would accept the COVID-19 vaccination if offered; however, nearly one-quarter of our respondents would not," the study said.

That rate of hesitancy generally matched what other researchers were finding in civilian populations, the study said.

The researchers believe the findings remain relevant even as the vaccination effort is in its seventh month.

"Much of the concern was regarding short- and long-term effects of the vaccine, and as more companies produce COVID-19 vaccines, there will be ongoing questions related to the safety of the vaccines," Andrew Berglund, one of the study's nine authors

and a critical-care physician at the Wright-Patterson Medical Center, said in an email to Stars and Stripes. "Future vaccines designed to prevent COVID-19 or other viruses will likely face similar concerns from the general population in regards to the safety and side effect profile."

Berglund said the research team did not have "concrete data" to determine how prevalent those early attitudes remain today.

"Based on my interactions with patients, there is still concern about long term side effects, but possibly some decreased concern regarding short term side effects," he said.

As of Wednesday, roughly 84% of sailors, Marines, soldiers and airmen in the U.S. armed forces had been either partially or fully vaccinated, according to Defense Department statistics.

Marine couple honored for flash flood rescue

BY JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps honored a dual military couple who helped rescue more than a dozen people stranded when a flash flood struck a riverside hiking trail to a scenic waterfall on Okinawa last year.

Master Gunnery Sgt. Ronald Thomas, 42, and Master Sgt. Sara Thomas, 44, were awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal on Tuesday at Camp Courtney. Both are assigned to the III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa.

“The whole mentality for me was never leave anyone behind,” Ronald Thomas told Stars and Stripes during a phone interview Friday.

On Sept. 13, 2020, the couple and their son were trekking with friends toward Ta-Taki Falls on a 1 1/2-mile out-and-back trail in Kunigami, according to a Marine Corps statement. The trail runs alongside the Henan River and includes rope climbs and paths that wind in and around the water.

“It was raining off and on the previous day, but it was sunny when we initially went out,” Thomas said in the interview.

Once they reached the waterfall, he no-

ticed the weather starting to change and suggested they head back.

“As we were getting the kids out of the water the rain picked up right away and the waterfall picked up immediately, making it tough for us to advance back,” he said.

Minutes later, the fast-rising river along the trail turned muddy and began rushing with a dangerous force, the Marine statement said.

The group made a path through the riverbank’s steep hillside, according to the Marine statement. After getting to a safe spot, they helped more than a dozen people, including Japanese residents and fellow service members, trapped on the other side by using a rope found on a fence to guide everyone across the rushing water.

The group finally made it to safety after hours of trekking and helping one another through the raging waters, according to the Marine statement.

“When faced with this challenge we didn’t know the other service members on the hike, but by the end we had a better understanding of each other,” Sara Thomas said. “The camaraderie of our service played a larger role in our success that day.”

Bear bites Japanese soldier while breaching gate at Hokkaido base

BY HANA KUSUMOTO
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A member of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force was bitten in the chest by a bear on Friday morning as it breached the main gate of Camp Okadama in Hokkaido, a JGSDF spokesman said.

The soldier, who was guarding the gate when the bear approached at about 7:50 a.m., suffered minor injuries to his chest, the spokesman said. It’s customary in Japan for some government officials to speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

The bear left the base, which is in the city of Sapporo, at about 8:15 a.m., the spokesman said, adding that the animal

did not cause any damage or affect base operations.

A local hunters group shot and killed the bear just after 11 a.m. northeast of Okadama Airport, which is adjacent to Camp Okadama, the spokesman said.

The bear, which was between 5 feet and 6 1/2 feet tall, had attacked and injured other people before entering the base, according to the Asahi newspaper.

Those victims include a 40-year-old man who suffered serious injuries, including a broken chest bone, in an attack in a residential area, the newspaper reported. A woman in her 80s and a man in his 70s received minor injuries.

For second time, Navy rescues sailors off Africa

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Navy oiler last week rescued four Somali men who’d been stranded at sea for days off the Horn of Africa after their fishing boat had a mechanical failure.

Sailors of an embarked security intelligence team and merchant mariners of the Military Sealift Command’s USNS Patuxent, a Henry J. Kaiser-class underway replenishment oiler, rescued the men in the Gulf of Aden, the Bahrain-based 5th Fleet said in a statement Friday.

The Somalis’ small fishing vessel was flying the international distress flag after drifting for 12 days and was taking on water, the statement said. The crew had been without food and water for several days, the Navy said in captions on photos published online. They were given food, water and a medical screening once they were aboard the Patuxent.

It’s the second time in about a week that the oiler’s crew rescued stranded sailors in the Gulf of Aden. On June 9, the Patuxent steamed at maximum speed to aid the 15-member crew of the Falcon Line, a cargo ship registered in the African nation of Gabon that was taking on water, arriving before it completely sank.

“I am extremely proud of them,” Navy Capt. Michael O’Driscoll, commander of Task Force 53, said of the oiler’s crew after the Somali fishermen were rescued Wednesday. “I think this perfectly highlights the value of a sustained maritime presence alongside our regional and coalition partners.”

The 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea obligates all mariners to provide assistance to those in distress at sea, 5th Fleet said. While it wasn’t immediately clear how many rescues the fleet’s ships have conducted in recent years, the command reported at least two rescues in 2020 and another two in 2019.

The four Somali fishermen were transferred Thursday from the Patuxent to two boats from the U.S. Navy’s Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti-based Maritime Expeditionary Security Squadron Eleven and then to the Djibouti coast guard patrol boat Damerjog, which took them back to shore.

Former Afghan president: US failed mission

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's former president said Sunday that the United States came to his country to fight extremism and bring stability to his war-tortured nation, but is leaving nearly 20 years later having failed at both.

In an interview with The Associated Press just weeks before the last U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, ending their 'forever war,' Hamid Karzai said extremism is at its "highest point" and the departing troops

are leaving behind a disaster.

"The international community came here 20 years ago with this clear objective of fighting extremism and bringing stability ... but extremism is at the highest point today. So they have failed," he said.

Their legacy is a war-ravaged nation in "total disgrace and disaster."

"We recognize as Afghans all our failures, but what about the bigger forces and powers who came here for exactly that purpose? Where are they leaving us

now?" he asked and answered: "In total disgrace and disaster."

Still, Karzai, who had a conflicted relationship with the U.S. during his 13-year rule, wanted the troops to leave, saying Afghans were united behind an overwhelming desire for peace and needed now to take responsibility for their future.

"We will be better off without their military presence," he said. "I think we should defend our own country and look after our own lives ... Their presence (has given us) what we have now

... We don't want to continue with this misery and indignity that we are facing. It is better for Afghanistan that they leave."

In April, when President Joe Biden announced the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 troops, he said America was leaving having achieved its goals. Al-Qaida had been greatly diminished and bin Laden was dead. America no longer needed boots on the ground to fight the terrorist threats that might emanate from Afghanistan, he said.

Former cabaret dancer now US Army recruiter

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

Staff Sgt. Oscar Gamboa's days as a professional cabaret dancer are behind him, but he still occasionally turns on his music in his Florida recruiting office and cuts a rug.

It's been over a decade since he performed at the popular Co-co Bongo Show & Disco cabaret in Cancun, Mexico, on the way from his hometown of Havana, Cuba, to becoming an American soldier.

"We did mambo, salsa, samba," Gamboa said in an Army statement recently. "There were plenty of others. Like Michael Jackson choreography, Madonna choreography. We used to do ballet, too."

Gamboa had joined a dance company in Havana in 1998, when he was 12 years old, and did ballroom dancing and swimming ballet as a professional there, the Army statement said.

He also met his wife, Claudia, through dancing. A Cuban native living in Florida after coming to the United States as a 3-year-old, she'd returned to Havana as a teen to learn to dance for her quinceanera, a traditional rite of passage for 15-year-old

Latina girls.

Gamboa was her instructor for more than a month, then her partner, or galan, when they and six other couples danced at a celebration in Havana in July 2007. They married in January 2011.

In 2009, Gamboa's father had been living in Cancun since 2006 and did the paperwork to get Gamboa from Cuba to Mexico, where he did a five-month stint at the Co-co Bongo before he shimmied to Reynosa, Mexico, in July 2009. He crossed McAllen, Texas, on Independence Day that year and took a 28-hour bus ride to Florida.

In Jacksonville, Fla., Claudia's father gave him a job at his trucking company, where he drove 18-wheelers around the country until 2011, the year he joined the Army. He marked 10 years in the service June 20 and plans to serve another decade.

"Ever since I got to the United States, I always had the desire to serve," he said. "This country gave me so much. It was the least I could do to pay back."

The Miami resident became a U.S. citizen in 2012. He's now in charge of the Orlando Physicians Recruiting Station and a father of three.

Germany to reopen to vaccinated Americans

By KARIN ZEITVOGEL

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN — Fully vaccinated Americans can once again travel to Germany to visit friends, family and tourist destinations, after a travel ban imposed more than a year ago was lifted Sunday.

"In view of falling infections in several (non-EU) countries, the federal government will allow entry for all purposes including tourism," the German Interior Ministry said Friday on its website.

Travelers from the United States or any of the other seven countries, regions and territories allowed into Germany again must have been fully vaccinated against the coronavirus at least 14 days before arrival, Interior Ministry spokeswoman Alina Vick told Stars and Stripes.

The vaccine must be one that has been authorized for use by Germany's medical regulator, the Paul Ehrlich Institute — either the Moderna, Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccines, all of which require two shots, or the single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine.

Germany also considers a

person to be fully vaccinated if they have had one dose of the AstraZeneca shot, followed by either the Pfizer or Moderna shot, the Paul Ehrlich Institute says on its website.

Vick said fully vaccinated travelers from the U.S. still have to provide a negative PCR or antigen test and fill in an online registration form, but Americans who entered Germany in recent weeks have said they were only asked for their passport and CDC vaccination certificate.

The new rules took effect at midnight Sunday, according to Vick. Travelers from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia and Lebanon are also covered by the rule change.

Germany last year closed its borders to all Americans not traveling on official business as coronavirus infections soared in the U.S.

Last week, it dropped the U.S. from a list of countries considered risk areas for the coronavirus, as a mass vaccination campaign that began in January helped drive down the incidence of the virus in the country.

Storm likely caused deadly crash in Ala.

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Tropical Depression Claudette claimed 12 lives in Alabama as the storm swept across the southeastern U.S., causing flash flooding and spurring tornadoes that destroyed dozens of homes.

Ten people, including nine children, were killed Saturday in a 15-vehicle crash about 35 miles south of Montgomery on Interstate 65, according to Butler County Coroner Wayne Garlock.

He said the vehicles likely hydroplaned on wet roads, with eight children, ages 4 to 17, killed in a van belonging to a youth ranch operated by the Alabama Sheriffs Association for abused or neglected children. A man and a 9-month-old baby died in a separate vehicle. Multiple people were also injured.

Meanwhile, a 24-year-old man and a 3-year-old boy were killed when a tree fell on their house just outside the Tuscaloosa city limits Saturday, Capt. Marty Sellers of the Tuscaloosa Violent Crimes Unit told The Tuscaloosa News.

The deaths occurred as drenching rains pelted northern Alabama and Georgia late Saturday. As much as 12 inches of rain was reported earlier from Claudette along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The eight girls killed in the van were returning to a youth ranch operated by the Alabama Sheriffs Association near Camp Hill, northeast of Montgomery, from a week at the beach in Gulf Shores, youth ranches CEO Michael Smith told The Associated Press. He said the director of the Tallapoosa County ranch survived the crash and was hospitalized in Montgomery. At least one of the dead was a child of the director, Smith said.

"This is the worst tragedy I've been a part of in my life," said Smith, who was driving Sunday to Camp Hill to talk to the remaining residents, who had returned from Gulf Shores in a separate van and did not see the wreck.

"Words cannot explain what I saw," Smith said of the accident site, which he visited Saturday. "We love these girls like

they're our own children."

Garlock said the location of the wreck is "notorious" for hydroplaning, as the northbound highway curves down a hill to a small creek. Traffic on that stretch of I-65 is usually filled with vacationers driving to and from Gulf of Mexico beaches on summer weekends.

"Butler County has had one of the most terrible traffic accidents," county Sheriff Danny Bond wrote on Facebook, adding: "I believe is the worst ever in our county."

The Tallapoosa County school system said counselors would be available Sunday at Reeltown High School, where some of the ranch residents were students. Smith said the ranch, which is Christian-based, would likely have a memorial service later, asking for prayers as he began to cry.

Shortly after landfall, a suspected tornado spurred by the storm demolished or badly damaged at least 50 homes in a small town in Alabama, just north of the Florida border.

Tornadoes were also reported in southwest Georgia.

Juneteenth, recalling end of slavery, is marked across US

Associated Press

Parades, picnics and lessons in history marked Juneteenth celebrations Saturday in the U.S., a day that carried even more significance after Congress and President Joe Biden created a federal holiday to commemorate the end of slavery.

A new national holiday was "really awesome. It's starting to recognize the African American experience," said Detroit artist Hubert Massey, 63. "But we still have a long way to go."

In Detroit, which is 80% Black, students from University Prep Art & Design High School dodged rain to repaint Massey's block-long message, "Power to the People," which was created last year on downtown Woodward Avenue.

The "o" in "Power" was a red fist in memory of George Floyd and other victims of excessive force by police, Massey said.

"We did the original," said Olivia Jones, 15, leaning on a long paint roller. "It's important that we return and share that same energy."

Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers brought the news of

freedom to enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas, two months after the Confederacy had surrendered. It was about 2½ years after the Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves in Southern states.

Biden on Thursday signed a bill creating Juneteenth National Independence Day. Since June 19 fell on a Saturday, the government observed the holiday Friday. At least nine states have designated it in law as an official paid state holiday, all but one acting after Floyd, a Black man, was killed last year in Minneapolis.

In Galveston, the birthplace of the holiday, celebrations included the dedication of a 5,000-square-foot mural titled "Absolute Equality." Opal Lee, 94, who was at Biden's side when he signed the bill, returned to Fort Worth, Texas, to lead a 2.5-mile walk symbolizing the 2½ years it took for slaves in Texas to find out they'd been freed.

A Juneteenth parade was held in Evanston, Ill., a Chicago suburb that is using tax revenue from marijuana sales to offer housing grants to Black residents for past discrimination and the lingering effects of slavery.

US student found dead in Russia, suspect arrested

Associate Press

MOSCOW — Russian news reports said searchers on Saturday found the body of an American student who went missing several days earlier and that a man has been arrested on suspicion of murder.

The body of Catherine Serou, 34, was found in a wooded area near the city of Bor, 250 miles east of Moscow, the reports said.

Local news reports said Serou was last seen on Tuesday after getting into a car. Her mother, Beccy Serou, of Vicksburg, Miss., told NPR that her daughter had last texted her: "In a car with a stranger. I hope I'm not being abducted."

Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement that a woman's body was found in Bor and that a suspect with a record of serious crimes had been arrested, but did not give names. The cause of death was not specified.

Catherine Serou moved from California to Russia in 2019 to study law at a university in Nizhny Novgorod, a major city adjacent to Bor, news reports said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teen's message in bottle gets reply from Portugal

VT ROYALTON — A Vermont teen's message in a bottle that traveled over 2,000 miles to the Azores, a small Portuguese archipelago, has received a response back.

Sean Smith, now 16, sent out a message in a bottle in 2018 on Thanksgiving day with his family in Rhode Island, the Valley News reported.

Smith left an email address on a note in case the bottle was ever found.

Three years later, the message was found by Boston-born Portuguese teen Christian Santos. He fished out the Powerade bottle and followed the instructions to message the email address, the newspaper said.

Smith discovered that Santos found his bottle through a post on Facebook made by Christian's mom, Molly Santos.

The teens met over Zoom for the first time, the newspaper said.

Guards fired after woman dragged down bar stairs

DC WASHINGTON — The owners of a Washington, D.C., bar said they are investigating an incident in which security guards were seen dragging a Black woman down a staircase and throwing her out of the bar.

Nellie's Sports Bar's owners also said on Facebook that they have "terminated, with immediate effect, the independent security vendor hired to protect our guests during Pride Week."

Video posted on social media showed a bouncer dragging the woman — identified by local

media as Keisha Young, 22 — down the stairs as observers scream, "Oh my God!" Some patrons are then seen fighting with the guards.

Man with machete killed another at grow house

FL TAMPA — A Florida man was convicted of killing a man with a machete after he and others broke into a marijuana grow house, prosecutors said in a press release.

A judge in Hillsborough County sentenced Yuniel Sentmanat-Gonzalez, 41, to life in prison after a jury convicted him of first-degree felony murder, burglary of a dwelling and attempted robbery.

The victim was operating a marijuana grow house inside his Brandon home when Sentmanat-Gonzalez and five others wearing masks shattered a sliding glass door and rushed into the house in 2015.

The victim fought back and pulled the mask off one of the attackers while pushing them out of the house.

Semitrailer overturns, spills milk along freeway

MI HOLLAND TOWNSHIP — Milk spilled from an overturned semitrailer shut down traffic for several hours along part of a freeway in western Michigan.

The truck's driver drifted from the roadway of Interstate 196 in Holland Township before overturning, according to the Ottawa County sheriff's office.

Another tanker from the trucking company was called in to pump the remaining milk from the semitrailer.

The sheriff's office did not report how much milk was hauled or how much spilled.

Man faked kidnapping to scam grandparents

NC GREENVILLE — A man faked his kidnapping to get ransom money out of his grandparents to pay off a drug dealer, a North Carolina sheriff's office said.

The Pitt County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that deputies received a call from a person who said his grandson had been kidnapped and that his abductors demanded a ransom.

According to the news release, Jeremy Nichols, 34, of Grimesland, returned to his grandparents' home unharmed, after which detectives determined the kidnapping was a hoax created by Nichols and a drug dealer to get the grandfather to pay off a debt.

School investigates antisemitism in yearbook

MA SEEKONK — A Massachusetts middle school is investigating after antisemitic imagery and other inappropriate words and drawings were found drawn in student yearbooks, schools officials said.

The eighth-grade students at Hurley Middle School in Seekonk "drew anti-Semitic imagery, a racist slur, and inappropriate drawings of a sexual nature, in multiple yearbooks during the school's annual yearbook signing event," district Superintendent Rich Drolet wrote in a letter to parents, WPRI and WJAR reported.

"We are taking this issue very

seriously and any students found to be involved in this incident will face appropriate disciplinary actions within the district," Drolet wrote.

Couple wins their second large lottery prize

ID BOISE — A southwestern Idaho couple who won \$50,000 playing the Idaho Lottery last spring defied the odds by winning an additional \$200,000 this month.

Idaho Lottery officials said Diane Chavez and her husband won the latest prize after purchasing a ticket in Nampa, where they live.

Lottery officials said the chances of winning the \$200,000 prize with the Scratch ticket are one in 169,208.

State is first to make all prison phone calls free

CT HARTFORD — Connecticut became the first state to make all prison phone calls free, addressing one of the biggest emotional and financial burdens faced by incarcerated men and women and their families as they try to stay in touch.

The state has a prison contract with phone vendor Securus Technologies, which charges up to \$5 for a 15-minute call. Those are some of the highest phone rates in the country.

The bill was signed into law by Gov. Ned Lamont and could go into effect as early as next month, supporters said.

It allows incarcerated men, women and juveniles a minimum of 90 minutes a day of free calls.

— From wire reports



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Bucks reach Eastern Conference finals

Associated Press

Once they could finally get off the court, the Milwaukee Bucks feasted their eyes on a welcome sight in the locker room.

The number “8” on their board signified the number of victories remaining to win a championship, following a sweep of Miami followed by a survival against Brooklyn.

“I’m really happy for what we got done. I’m really happy we were able to write 8 on the board. But the job is not done,” Giannis Antetokounmpo said.

“We’ve got to keep believing in ourselves. We’ve got to keep playing good basketball and take it game by game. The job is not done. We’re halfway through.”

They got there by edging the Nets 115-111 in Brooklyn on Saturday night in the first Game 7 to go overtime since 2006. Antetokounmpo had 40 points and 13 rebounds, and Khris Middleton made the tiebreaking shot with 40 seconds left in OT.

The third-seeded Bucks advanced to the Eastern Conference finals for the second time in three years. They will play either

top-seeded Philadelphia or No. 5 Atlanta in a series that starts Wednesday.

“We’re definitely proud of where we are. We put a lot of work in to get to this point,” center Brook Lopez said. “But, you know, our goal this season at the beginning of the season wasn’t just to make it to the Eastern Conference finals. Obviously we want to win a championship.”

The Bucks blew a 2-0 lead last time they got to the conference finals, losing four straight to the eventual NBA champion Toronto Raptors in 2019.

They overcame that deficit this time, turning the series around after dropping Game 2 by 39 points and pulling out a deciding game that turned into a thriller.

“It’s just been a heck of a series,” coach Mike Budenholzer said. “You put so much emotion and so much energy and time in it. For this group to be rewarded with a huge win in a Game 7 in overtime, it’s just a great group. You feel great for the group, great for the players.”

Antetokounmpo tied Kareem Abdul-Jab-

bar’s franchise playoff record with five straight games of 30 points and 10 rebounds. He capped it off by becoming the first player in NBA history with at least 40 points, 10 boards and five assists in a Game 7 victory.

The Bucks had the best record in the league last season but couldn’t get out of the second round. They acquired Jrue Holiday before this season to team with Antetokounmpo and Middleton, their two All-Stars, and built a team that was better prepared for the postseason.

Milwaukee is unbeaten at home in the postseason and would play there to start the next round if Atlanta wins Sunday. But even if they are on the road, the Bucks are confident in their chances.

They overcame Kevin Durant’s 48 points in Game 7 and are ready for whoever comes next.

“To be able to finally get over the hump against him is pretty nice. I’m excited,” forward P.J. Tucker said. “We’re just getting started, though. We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

Gonzalez lifts Vandy past Arizona in 12th

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Vanderbilt made it to Omaha with a young team, one almost entirely different from the one that won the national championship here in 2019.

It was one of the Commodores’ old hands, though, who got them off to a winning start at the College World Series this year.

Jayson Gonzalez singled through the infield with the bases loaded in the bottom of the 12th inning, giving Vandy a 7-6 win over Arizona on Saturday night.

Gonzalez grounded a 1-2 pitch beyond diving shortstop Nik McCloughry’s glove to end the first extra-inning game at the CWS since 2014. It lasted 4 hours, 51 minutes, making it the fourth-longest game in CWS history.

“It’s a dream come true to be here, to be in the situation,” said Gonzalez, one of Vandy’s three seniors. “We’ve all worked so hard to get to this

moment, so it’s a pretty special moment.”

Arizona’s Vince Vannelle (5-3) worked out of a bases-loaded situation in the bottom of the 11th, but the Commodores (46-15) wouldn’t be denied in the 12th.

Isaiah Thomas led off with an infield single and Parker Noland bunted for a hit before Vannelle walked Javier Vaz. Gonzalez then came through for the second time in the game. He had hit a tying home run in the fourth inning.

“Any time you win a game like that ... it wasn’t easy, it was long, and I think it gives you a certain amount of confidence, as it should,” Vandy coach Tim Corbin said.

Chris McElvain (5-1) held Arizona (45-17) scoreless in the top of the 12th after Donta Williams doubled to the wall leading off, getting a flyout and two strikeouts.

The game marked the roughest postseason start for Vanderbilt star Kumar Rocker.

Rocker, projected to be a top-10 pick in the Major League Baseball draft next month, gave up three runs in the first inning and was pulled after Ryan Hologate’s two-run homer in the sixth put the Wildcats up 5-3.

The 2019 CWS Most Outstanding Player entered the game having won all six of his previous NCAA Tournament starts, allowing three runs in 42½ innings.

North Carolina State 10, Stanford 4: At Omaha, Neb., Jonny Butler homered and drove in a career-high five runs, Reid Johnston pitched six strong innings and the Wolfpack opened the College World Series with a 10-4 victory over the Cardinal on Saturday.

North Carolina State (36-18), which knocked out No. 1 national seed Arkansas in the super regionals last week, continued its postseason roll in the first CWS game since 2019. The 2020 event was canceled due to the pandemic.

The Wolfpack got out to a 2-0

lead in the first inning on Butler’s homer to right off Pac-12 pitcher of the year Brendan Beck. After Devonte Brown barely cleared the fence in right-center in the fourth to give NC State at least two homers in 17 of its last 21 games, Butler’s two-run single made it 6-0.

Butler led a Wolfpack offense that finished with 12 hits, including five for extra bases, and capitalized on Stanford’s three errors.

“He’s a model of consistency in everything he does,” NC State coach Elliott Avent said. “Some guys like that fly under the radar. It’s hard for Jonny Butler to fly under the radar.”

Avent had said before the game that offensive versatility would be important at TD Ameritrade Park, which is not known for surrendering many home runs. Each team homered twice on an 86-degree day with a light breeze.

“The wind was a little friendly today,” Butler said.

Martin, Pullock help Isles even series

Associated Press

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — With goalie Semyon Varlamov out of position in the closing seconds, New York defenseman Ryan Pullock knew he needed to get in the way of Ryan McDonagh's shot at the open net. It was the biggest play in the Islanders' latest series-tying Game 4 win.

Matt Martin capped a three-goal second period, Pullock made a diving stop and New York held on to beat the Tampa Bay Lightning 3-2 Saturday night to even their Stanley Cup semifinal series at two games apiece.

Josh Bailey and Mathew Barzal also scored, and Cal Clutterbuck and Adam Pelech each had two assists. Semyon Varlamov finished with 28 saves to help the Islanders win a Game 4 to tie a series after dropping the previous game at home for the third time this postseason.

But Pullock made the biggest save with the game on the line.

McDonagh had the puck on the left side in the waning seconds, spun around to get away from Brock Nelson and drew Varla-

mov forward before sending the puck at the open net. But Pullock's dive kept the puck out and preserved the win.

"McDonagh got a puck walking down and Varly came out and challenged," Pullock said. "He made a heck of a play with the spin-o-rama, the net was open and I just tried to make myself big and take it away and I was able to get it.

"Obviously you hear the sound, the clock go and all the boys jump on you. It's a good feeling."

Pullock drew plenty of praise from his teammates.

"That's a special play," Bailey said. "Patience to just stick with it. It was a great play by him, a game-saving play, obviously. Huge."

Barzal agreed, adding: "I think everybody's breath got taken away when that puck was coming. I thought it was going in and then just a miraculous play by Pulley. I'm not going to be forgetting that one."

Brayden Point had a goal for the seventh straight game, and Tyler Johnson also

scored for the defending champion Lightning. Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 27 saves.

"These guys have given it their all for whatever it's been now, a month and change (in the playoffs)," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said. "Sometimes you lay an egg and we laid one in the second period."

Game 5 is Monday night in Tampa, Fla., with Game 6 back at Nassau Coliseum on Wednesday night.

The Lightning pulled Vasilevskiy for an extra skater with about 1:50 left, but he returned to the ice 38 seconds later when Victor Hedman was called for tripping Clutterbuck to give New York a power play.

Point got Tampa Bay on the scoreboard 3:45 into the third as he brought the puck up the right side and beat Varlamov with a shot from nearly 50 feet out. It was Point's league-best 12th of the postseason and tied Claude Lemieux (1997), Joe Sakic (1996), Mario Lemieux (1996), Pat LaFontaine (1992) and Mario Lemieux (1991) for the longest streak in the last 30 years.

Eye-catching: Richardson rules 100 in track trials

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Whether watching from Jamaica, Japan or the U.S. it was hard to miss that shock of flowing, orange hair that came streaking across the finish line first in Eugene on Saturday night.

It belongs to Sha'Carri Richardson. And after the eye-opening show she put on at Olympic trials — blowing away the field in the 100-meter semis in a wind-aided 10.64 seconds, then again in the final in 10.86 — she figures to grab her fair share of attention next month in Tokyo.

With her performance, the 21-year-old out of LSU picked up a spot in the Olympics and a national title while also setting up a possible showdown with the Jamaican world champion, Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who is well-known for her colorful hairstyles, too.

"It's loud and encouraging and, honestly, dangerous," Richardson said when asked why she chose the color orange for her big night. "Knowing I'm coming to one of the biggest meets there is, if you're going to out there and be the best, you need to look the best."

Richardson said crossing the finish line first was only the second-best feeling of the night. The best came afterward, when she climbed halfway up the stands at Hayward Field and shared a long hug with her grandmother, Betty Harp, who's also known in the family as "Big Momma."

"To be able to have her here at the biggest meet in my life, and to cross the finish line and run up the steps to hug her knowing I'm an Olympian, actually that's probably better than winning the race," Richardson said.

But that performance — it was pretty special, too.

An over-the-limit tailwind in the semis prevented the 10.64 from becoming official and leaving Richardson only 0.01 behind Fraser-Pryce's top time of 2021. The world record of 10.49 was set by Florence Griffith Joyner in 1988.

In the final, Richardson overcame a slow start to pass her training partner Javianne Oliver, a 60-meter indoor specialist who started in the lane next to her. Richardson beat Oliver by three body lengths and 0.13 seconds.

Dressel, Ledecky keep winning at U.S. swim trials

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — America's biggest swimming stars shined brightly on the next-to-last night of the Olympic trials.

Their only complaint? Both wanted to go a bit faster Saturday.

Caeleb Dressel added another event to his Tokyo program, powering to a dominating victory in the 100-meter butterfly.

Katie Ledecky blew away the field in the 800 freestyle, winning by more than 5 seconds in a race where the battle for second provided the only drama.

Ledecky locked up her fourth individual race at the Olympics with a time of 8 minutes, 14.62 seconds, adding to her victories in the 200, 400 and 1,500 free.

Leading right from the start, Ledecky was essentially racing herself. She started out under world-record pace but tailed off when it quickly became clear no one could beat her.

"It's challenging," she said of being so far ahead of the field. "Sometimes I feel like I'm going faster than I am."

Oosthuizen, Hughes eagle way to lead

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The eagle putts looked familiar for a Saturday at Torrey Pines in June, even with Tiger Woods nowhere in sight.

Mackenzie Hughes watched his 60-foot eagle putt from the back of the green to the front on the par-5 13th slide into the cup. Louis Oosthuizen could only hope his 50-foot eagle putt on the 18th found the center of the cup, and it kissed off the pin and disappeared.

Woods made eagle putts from one end of the green to the other on the 13th and 18th holes in 2008 that set the stage for a Sunday filled with anticipation.

Suddenly, this U.S. Open has that familiar feel.

A major that for two days had the sleepy, chill vibe of San Diego now has an urgency for Oosthuizen and Rory McIlroy trying to end long droughts, hope for newcomers like Hughes and Russell Henley, a half-

dozen other possibilities that include Bryson DeChambeau and Jon Rahm.

“It’s a golf course where anything can happen,” said Oosthuizen, in the mix at a major for the second straight time. “It’s just a tough, old-fashioned golf course. You’re going to have nerves. You’re going to feel it. It’s about how you’re going to handle it.”

Hughes added a final birdie for a 3-under 68 and was the first to get to 5-under 208. Oosthuizen made a 30-foot birdie putt on the 16th and ended his round of 70 with the 50-foot eagle on the 18th to join him.

They were tied with Russell Henley, who had a two-shot lead early on the back nine and appeared to be hanging on for dear life at the end. He went from the bunker to the rough to the bunker on the easiest hole at Torrey Pines and had to make an 8-foot par putt for a 71.

McIlroy (67) and DeChambeau (68) were two shots behind.

McIlroy has gone seven years without a major, a drought accentuated by rarely even having decent chances. DeChambeau can get the last laugh in his beef with Brooks Koepka by joining him as a back-to-back U.S. Open champion.

“I thought like two 68s over the weekend from where I was after Friday was going to have a good chance,” said McIlroy, who started the third round six shots behind. “I’ve done the first part of that job. Now it’s up to me tomorrow to go out and try to play a similar round of golf.”

Woods is recovering from his February car crash that badly injured his legs and is not back at Torrey Pines. In his absence, the broadcast used every opportunity to relive memories of his two eagles that gave him the 54-hole lead.

It took two players to do that this time, but it was equally spectacular.

“I know Tiger’s was further right, but halfway there, I loved it,” Hughes said.

Urshela takes shard in eye, hits Yanks’ go-ahead HR

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Gio Urshela stayed in the game despite a shard of a broken bat hitting his right eye in the second inning and hit a go-ahead homer eighth as the New York Yankees rallied from a three-run deficit in a 7-5 victory Saturday that stopped the Oakland Athletics’ seven-game winning streak.

Aroldis Chapman struck out Matt Chapman on a 103.4 mph pitch to strand two runners in the ninth for his 15th save.

Urshela singled in New York’s first run in the fourth and put the Yankees ahead 5-4 in the eighth when he lifted a 98.6 mph fastball from Jesús Luzardo (2-4) into the netting above Monument Park in center. DJ LeMahieu added a two-run single against Sergio Romo.

Chad Green (2-4) struck out the side in the eighth.

Padres 7, Reds 5: Rookie Kim Ha-seong hit a tiebreaking, two-run home run with two outs in the eighth — three innings after he replaced injured star

shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. — and San Diego beat visiting Cincinnati.

Dodgers 9, Diamondbacks 3: Walker Buehler took a no-hitter into the eighth inning as Los Angeles won at Arizona.

The 26-year-old right-hander walked two, hit a batter and struck out a season-best 11. He was pulled with one out in the eighth after giving up singles to David Peralta and Nick Ahmed.

Arizona has lost a franchise-record 16 straight and dropped 39 of its past 44 games. The Diamondbacks have the worst record in the major leagues at 20-52.

Phillies 13, Giants 6: Rhys Hoskins broke out a 2-for-40 slump with a pair of home runs and a career-best six RBIs, leading Philadelphia to a win at San Francisco.

Marlins 11, Cubs 1: Adam Duvall homered twice for the second straight game, and Pablo López (3-4) pitched one-hit ball over seven innings in a win at Chicago.

Mets 5-2, Nationals 1-6: Jon Lester pitched shutout ball into the seventh inning to gain his first win for Washington, Kyle Schwarber backed him with four RBIs on a pair of home runs and the host Nationals split a doubleheader with New York.

In the opener, Francisco Lindor homered in the first on a sinker from Joe Ross, singled in the third on a changeup for a 3-0 lead and homered in the fifth on a slider for his 12th multi-homer game.

Twins 3, Rangers 2: Max Kepler scored the go-ahead run on a second consecutive wild pitch from Texas reliever John King (5-5) in the seventh inning, and Minnesota won on the road.

Pirates 6, Indians 3: Michael Perez and Bryan Reynolds hit three-run home runs during the seventh inning and host Pittsburgh rallied past Cleveland.

Blue Jays 10, Orioles 7: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit his major-league leading 23rd homer and capped a ninth-inning rally with a go-ahead, two-run double as Toronto won at Baltimore to end

a five-game skid.

Red Sox 7, Royals 1: Light-hitting Bobby Dalbec hit a two-run homer and had three RBIs, finishing a double short of a cycle, and J.D. Martinez hit a two-run homer in Boston’s win at Kansas City.

Astros 7, White Sox 3: Rookie Robel Garcia tied a career high with three RBIs, Carlos Correa homered and host Houston beat Lance Lynn and Chicago.

Angels 8, Tigers 3: Shohei Ohtani homered for the fourth time in five games and matched his high for homers in a season as Los Angeles beat Detroit for its sixth straight home win.

Brewers 6, Rockies 5: Willy Adames had four hits, including a go-ahead two-run home run in the top of the ninth inning, and Milwaukee rallied to win at Colorado.

Mariners 6, Rays 5 (10): J.P. Crawford scored the winning run on Mitch Haniger’s 10th-inning single and hit a grand slam to lift host Seattle over Tampa Bay.