

Navy censures 5 officers in deadly AAV sinking

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Navy has issued letters of censure to three Marine and two Navy officers in connection with the sinking of an amphibious assault vehicle off the Southern California coast in 2020 that killed eight Marines and a sailor.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro, in a statement Monday, faulted the officers for “inadequate leadership and execution of their oversight duties.” Censure letters are put in service members’ personnel files and are often career-ending for military officers, usually preventing them from further promotion or other progress.

A Marine Corps investigation found that inadequate training, shabby maintenance and poor judgment by leaders led to the July 30, 2020, sinking of the amphibious assault vehicle in one

of the deadliest Marine training accidents in decades.

The vehicle had 16 people aboard when it sank rapidly in 385 feet of water off the coast of San Clemente Island. Seven Marines were rescued as the vessel was returning to a Navy ship on a training exercise.

Del Toro said Lt. Gen. Joseph Osterman, who was commander of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, failed to recognize and address the risks of the exercise, including training and safety failures. He said Osterman, who is now retired, also didn’t recognize the impact of COVID-19 on the exercise, which forced commanders to adjust the timing and schedule.

Del Toro said Col. Christopher Bronzi, who was serving as commander of the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit, either knew or should have known that

pre-deployment waterborne training was not finished and that the amphibious vehicles were “in a degraded state of readiness.”

“The investigations revealed critical safety measures were not implemented during the mishap,” said Del Toro. “Accountability for these failures rests with you.”

In a letter of censure to Navy Capt. Stewart Bateshansky, Del Toro pointed to “gaps and seams” in the planning of the exercise. He said that while Bateshansky, who was commander of the amphibious task force for the exercise, reduced the complexity of the planned event, his instructions to subordinate commanders weren’t clear about the ability to abort or delay the launch from the beach.

Navy Capt. John Kurtz, who

was the commanding officer on the USS Somerset, was censured for failing to ensure the safe operation of the amphibious vehicles.

Del Toro said that while “the investigation did not establish that any of USS Somerset’s actions or inactions caused the sinking,” he said that Kurtz’s crew “was poorly informed of the risks and measures required” for safe operation of the amphibious vehicles.

He said Lt. Col. Keith Brenize, former commander of the 3rd Assault Amphibian Battalion, failed to ensure the platoon was trained for deployment and that the vehicles were operationally sound.

“While no single decision or act led to this mishap, your decisions and acts set the conditions for this mishap to occur,” Del Toro said.

China asserts control over Taiwan Strait, rejects US stance

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

China claims exclusive rights over the Taiwan Strait, a spokesman for the country’s Foreign Ministry said Monday, a statement that could set up a confrontation with U.S. warships that regularly transit the region.

“China has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the Taiwan Strait. At the same time, it respects the lawful rights of other countries in relevant waters,” China Foreign Ministry spokesman Wenbin Wang said at a Monday news conference.

China for months has privately told the U.S. government that it considers the waters separating Taiwan from the mainland as part of China’s exclusive economic zone, Bloomberg News reported Monday, citing an anonymous source. The United States and other nations regard the strait as international waters where their warships are free to pass.

An exclusive economic zone, or EEZ, lies beyond a country’s 12-nautical-mile maritime territorial limit and gives that country certain rights, including the right to the natural resources there, according to the 1989 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Referring to the Taiwan Strait as “international waters” is an attempt to manipulate China’s claim over the island of Taiwan, Wang said Monday.

“There is no legal basis of ‘international waters’ in the international law of the sea,” he said. He said Taiwan is an “inalienable part of China’s territory.”

The U.S. has sent a Navy warship through the area once a month so far this year.

“U.S. Navy ships use the Taiwan Strait to transit between the South China Sea and the East China Sea in accordance with international law, and have done so for many years,” Navy spokesman Lt. Mark Langford told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

By claiming the Taiwan Strait as its own, China may be laying a basis to deny foreign military vessels access to those waters, according to James Brown, an international affairs expert at Temple University’s Japan campus.

The U.S. is not party to the Law of the Sea Treaty but generally abides by its provisions, according to the Stockton Center for International Law. The treaty guarantees freedom of navigation through economic exclusion zones, but its exact implications for foreign warships are debated.

“Many Western countries interpret UNCLOS as permitting external states to conduct military exercises within another country’s EEZ under the principle of ‘navigational freedom,’” Brown said in a Monday email to Stars and Stripes. “However, this interpretation is not shared by Beijing. China takes the view that military exercises are harmful to national security and thus should not be permitted within its EEZ.”

Russia controls 80% of east Ukraine city

Associated Press

LIV, Ukraine — Russian troops control about 80% of the fiercely contested eastern Ukrainian city of Sievierodonetsk and have destroyed all three bridges leading out of the city but Ukrainian authorities are still trying to evacuate more wounded residents, a regional official said Tuesday.

Serhiy Haidai, governor of the eastern Luhansk region, acknowledged that a mass evacuation of civilians from Sievierodonetsk now is “simply not possible” due to the relentless shelling and fighting in the city. Ukrainian forces have been pushed to the industrial outskirts of the city because of “the scorched earth method and heavy artillery the Russians are using,” he said.

“There is still an opportunity for the evacuation of the wound-

ed, communication with the Ukrainian military and local residents,” he told The Associated Press by telephone, adding that Russian forces have not yet blocked off the strategic city.

About 12,000 people remain in Sievierodonetsk compared with its prewar population of 100,000. More than 500 civilians are sheltering in the Azot chemical plant, which is being relentlessly pounded by the Russians, according to Haidai.

In all, 70 civilians were evacuated from the Luhansk region in the last day, the governor said.

A Russian general, meanwhile, says a humanitarian corridor will be opened Wednesday to evacuate civilians from the besieged Azot plant. Col.-Gen. Mkhail Mizintsev said evacuees would be taken to the town of Svatovo, 35 miles to the north in territory un-

der the control of Russian and separatist forces. He said the plan was made after Ukraine called for establishing an evacuation corridor leading to Ukrainian-controlled territory.

Mizintsev, head of the National Defense Management Center, is accused by Ukraine of human rights violations while commanding troops during the long siege of Mariupol, Ukraine’s key port on the Sea of Azov that has been taken over by the Russians.

Russian forces in the last few weeks have pressed hard to capture Ukraine’s eastern industrial Donbas area, which borders Russia and is made up of the regions of Luhansk and Donetsk.

“The situation is difficult,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a news conference Tuesday with Danish media. “Our task is to fight back.”

Jan Egeland, secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, one of the aid organizations supplying food to the people in the Donbas, said fighting in the past few weeks has made regular food distributions impossible. Now, he said, the remaining civilians in the city “are almost entirely cut off from aid supplies after the destruction of the last bridge.”

Ukrainian authorities said Tuesday they had received the bodies of 64 defenders of the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol in the latest body swap with Russia.

The statement by the Ministry for Reintegration of Occupied Territories said the exchange took place in the Zaporizhzhia region, but didn’t clarify how many bodies were returned to Russia.

It was one of the several body swaps the warring sides have conducted.

DOD aims to learn from Russian fuel, supply issues in Ukraine

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Russia’s struggles to supply its forces with fuel as it wages a war in Ukraine have caused the U.S. to reflect on the importance of ensuring it can deliver essential goods to its fleet should conflict erupt in the Indo-Pacific region, Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said Monday.

“Making sure we understand how to go after that logistics challenge — that, I think, is one lesson that we can extrapolate from what we see today,” Hicks said at Defense One Tech Summit, an annual virtual defense symposium.

Russia’s failures to keep its forces properly supplied in its battle have plagued their advances since the first days of its invasion into Ukraine on Feb. 24, senior U.S. defense officials have

previously said.

Hicks said the Defense Department has taken Russia’s failures as a reminder of the consequential nature of proper logistics, especially if conflict erupts between the U.S. and China in the Indo-Pacific region where tensions mount over the sovereignty of Taiwan and access to the shipping lanes of the South China Sea.

“The Russians are operating on their own border and yet we saw substantial logistics challenges,” she said. “For the United States to be effective in the Pacific, we already know we have a significant logistics challenge, worsened by the reliance that we have on fuel.”

The Navy’s surface combatant ships, such as guided-missile destroyers and cruisers, require fuel. While aircraft carriers use nuclear power, a lack of fuel would ground the aircraft on board.

USAF clears crew in Kabul wheel well flight incident

The Washington Post

The U.S. Air Force on Monday said it would take no disciplinary action against personnel who flew from Afghanistan to Qatar in August with human remains in the wheel well of their C-17 cargo plane, saying the crew exhibited “sound judgment” in the face of an “unprecedented” security crisis as dozens of Afghans swarmed the aircraft before takeoff.

Officials, citing an investigation by the Air Force Office of Special Investigations, called the incident a “tragic event.”

The discovery occurred at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar on Aug. 16 after the crew struggled to close the plane’s landing gear and declared an in-flight emergency, U.S. military officials said at the time. A day prior, Taliban fighters had swept into Kabul, the capital, completing a conquest two dec-

ades in the making and setting off a surreal scene at Hamid Karzai International Airport.

Hordes of Afghan civilians, desperate to flee the incoming regime, descended on the airport, pushing past barriers and pouring onto the flight line in a desperate, futile bid to chase down the hulking military aircraft. Video footage captured during the chaos showed people climbing onto the outside of taxiing planes.

U.S. military officials reviewed the Air Force investigation and determined the C-17 crew “was in compliance with applicable rules of engagement specific to the event and the overall law of armed conflict,” said Ann Stefanek, a spokeswoman for the service. Commanders determined the crew “acted appropriately” in deciding “to get airborne as quickly as possible,” she said.

US producer prices soar 10.8% in May

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. producer prices surged 10.8% in May from a year earlier, underscoring the ongoing threat to the economy from inflation that shows no sign of slowing.

Tuesday's report from the Labor Department showed that the producer price index — which measures inflation before it reaches consumers — rose at a slightly slower pace last month than in April, when it jumped 10.9% from a year earlier, and is down from an 11.5% yearly gain in March.

On a monthly basis, producer prices climbed 0.8% in May from April, above the previous month, when they increased 0.4%.

Energy prices, led by gas, rose 5% just in May from April. Another big driver of the price gains last month was a sharp 2.9% increase in the cost of truck freight hauling, a sign that supply chain problems still aren't fully resolved. Food costs were unchanged.

The figures indicate that rising prices will continue to erode Americans' paychecks and wreak havoc on household budgets in the coming months. Inflation has created major political headaches for President Joe Biden and congressional Democrats and has forced the Federal Reserve into a series of rapid interest rate hikes intended to slow the economy and cool price increases.

On Friday, the government reported that inflation — as measured by the consumer price index — jumped to a new 40-year high of 8.6% in May, a surprise gain that disappointed expectations that price increases might be slowing. Gas and food costs rose sharply, pushed higher by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but the costs for rent, new and used cars, medical care, and clothing also rose, evidence that inflation is spreading more broadly through the economy.

The Federal Reserve is expected to hike its short-term interest rate by three-quarters of a point on Wednesday, the largest increase since 1994, as it ramps up its efforts to rein in higher prices.

Biden to focus on security issues in Middle East tour

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

President Joe Biden's Middle East visit next month will bring him face to face with counterparts in a region that has been altered amid the declared end of two American wars and the development of ties based on countries' mutual distrust of Iran.

U.S. officials have dubbed the new approach a realignment following the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, defense ties between Israel and the Persian Gulf countries are deepening in the wake of a landmark deal brokered by Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump. Biden has rejected claims that his trip is related to the price of oil, which has spiked in recent months.

"It has to do with national security for (Saudi Arabia), for Israelis," Biden told reporters Saturday, according to The Hill. "It has to do with much larger issues than having to do with the energy piece."

The White House formally announced the trip Tuesday. It will run from July 13-16 and include stops in Israel, the West Bank and Saudi Arabia, White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre said in a statement.

Biden will speak with Israeli leaders and the Palestinian Authority, which oversees administration of the Palestinian areas in the West Bank. In Saudi Arabia, he will attend a meeting with nine leaders from countries in the region, the statement said.

A focus of the visit will be Israel's "increasing integration into the region," CBSNews reported. The president is scheduled to see U.S.-funded defense systems such as the Iron Dome in use, the report said.

Israel was absorbed into U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility last year. The realignment came after Israel signed the Abraham Accords with leaders of Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates on Sept. 15, 2020.

The agreement has led to Israeli participation in military exercises with nearby coun-

tries. Such cooperation "would have been inconceivable before the normalization agreements," said CENTCOM's latest posture statement, issued March 22.

Israel and the Gulf countries share concerns about Iran, a regional rival that supports militant groups around the Middle East.

Iran faces international scrutiny over fears of possible ambitions for nuclear weapons, which it has denied. Last week, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog condemned Iran's removal of 27 surveillance cameras at nuclear sites.

Biden is expected to meet with Saudi Arabia's controversial crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, a senior administration told reporters on a briefing call, Axios reported Tuesday.

That would signal a turnaround from Biden's stance on the campaign trail, when he called Saudi Arabia a "pariah" over the kingdom's alleged violations of human rights, including the killing of Washington Post reporter Jamal Khashoggi.

Hearings are denied for immigrants seeking release

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has ruled against immigrants who are seeking their release from long periods of detention while they fight deportation orders.

In two cases decided Monday, the court said that the immigrants, who fear persecution if sent back to their native countries, have no right under a federal law to a bond hearing at which they could argue for their freedom no matter how long they are held.

The justices also ruled 6-3 to limit the immigrants' ability to band together in court, an outcome that Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote "will leave many vulnerable noncitizens unable to protect their rights."

In recent years, the high court has taken an increasingly limited view of immigrants' access to the federal court system under immigration measures enacted in the 1990s and 2000s.

"For a while, it seemed like the court was

going to push back a bit. In extreme cases, it would interpret a statute to allow for as much judicial review as possible," said Nicole Hallet, director of the immigrants rights clinic at the University of Chicago law school. "Clearly now, the court is no longer willing to do that."

The immigrants who sued for a bond hearing are facing being detained for many months, even years, before their cases are resolved.

Yellowstone assesses damage after historic floods

Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. — A torrent of rain combined with a rapidly melting snowpack caused a deluge of flooding that forced the evacuation of some parts of Yellowstone National Park, cutting off electricity and forcing park officials to close all entrances indefinitely, just as the summer tourist season was ramping up.

While numerous homes and other structures were destroyed, there were no immediate reports of injuries. Yellowstone officials said they were assessing damage from the storms, which washed away bridges, caused mudslides and left small cities isolated, forcing evacuations by boat and helicopter.

It's unclear how many visitors are stranded or have been forced to leave the park and how many people who live outside the park have been rescued and evacuated.

Some of the worst damage happened in

the northern part of the park and Yellowstone's gateway communities in southern Montana. National Park Service photos of northern Yellowstone showed a mudslide, washed out bridges and roads undercut by churning floodwaters of the Gardner and Lamar rivers.

The flooding cut off road access to Gardiner, Mont., a town of about 900 people near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Gardner rivers, just outside Yellowstone's busy North Entrance.

Cooke City was also isolated by floodwaters and evacuations were also issued for residents in Livingston.

Officials in Park County, which encompasses those cities, said on Facebook on Monday evening that extensive flooding throughout the county had made drinking water unsafe in many areas. Evacuations and rescues were ongoing and officials urged people who were in a safe place to

stay put overnight.

The Montana National Guard said Monday it sent two helicopters to southern Montana to help with the evacuations.

Cory Mottice, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Billings, Mont., said rain is not in the immediate forecast, and cooler temperatures will lessen the snowmelt in coming days.

"This is flooding that we've just never seen in our lifetimes before," Mottice said.

Scientists say climate change is responsible for more intense and more frequent extreme events such as storms, droughts, floods and wildfires, although single weather events usually cannot be directly linked to climate change without extensive study.

The Yellowstone River at Corwin Springs crested at 13.88 feet Monday, higher than the previous record of 11.5 feet set in 1918, according to the National Weather Service.

Wildfires force Ariz., Calif., NM residents to evacuate

Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — The northern Arizona city of Flagstaff is synonymous with mountains — lush with ponderosa pines, meadows and hiking trails that are a respite from the desert heat. Now, parts of them are burning yet again this year, fueled by winds that grounded air resources Monday. Fire crews were anticipating more moderate winds Tuesday and throughout the week, which could help them get a better handle on the blaze that has largely spared homes but made a run into a wilderness area and toward a lava dome volcano.

Residents around the city looked toward the mountains as smoke billowed through the air and winds howled, some scared, some nervous — most hoping that moisture in the forecast late this week brings some relief.

"We're most definitely dry," Flagstaff resident Colin Challifour said late Monday. "The forests are dry. It's unfortunate. You don't like to see it."

Roughly 2,500 homes have been evacuated because of two wildfires burning on the outskirts of Flagstaff. One home and a secondary structure burned, the Coconino County Sheriff's Office said. Hundreds of other people in California and New Mexico have also been forced to flee homes threatened by wildfires. In northern Arizona, Coconino County declared an emergency because of the wildfire.

Fire incident Cmdr. Aaron Graeser said the Flagstaff-area blaze is one of the top priorities in the country for firefighting resources. It was estimated at 8 square miles late Monday, but fire managers haven't been able to do aerial mapping. Two other smaller wildfires northeast of the blaze merged, forcing evacuations in a more remote area Monday. Wildfires broke out early this spring in the Western U.S., where climate change and an enduring drought are fanning the frequency and intensity of forest and grassland fires.

Ohio now allows school employees to be armed

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Ohio school districts could begin arming employees as soon as this fall under a bill signed into law Monday by GOP Gov. Mike DeWine.

The law, as enacted, requires up to 24 hours of training before an employee can go armed, and up to eight hours of annual training.

The training programs must be approved by the Ohio School Safety Center, and DeWine announced he's ordering the center to require the maximum 24 hours and the maximum eight hours.

Schools can provide additional training if they wish, DeWine said.

Before announcing the bill signing, the governor outlined several other school safety measures he and lawmakers have promoted, including \$100 million for school security upgrades in schools and \$5 million for upgrades at colleges.

The state is also adding 28

employees to the school safety center to work with districts on safety issues and to provide training under the new law. Ohio has also provided \$1.2 billion in wellness funding for schools to address mental health and other issues, the governor said.

The new law "is giving schools an option, based on their particular circumstances, to make the best decision they can make with the best information they have," DeWine said.

The governor said his preference remains that school districts hire armed school resource officers, but said the law is another tool for districts that want to protect children. He emphasized that it's optional, not a requirement.

Several big-city Ohio mayors — all Democrats — joined together Monday afternoon to criticize the measure and failure of Republican lawmakers to consider any gun control proposals.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Road rage murder case denies cough syrup plea

MO SPRINGFIELD — A Missouri woman has been convicted in a road rage killing after jurors rejected defense arguments that she suffered from cough syrup-induced psychosis.

The Springfield News-Leader reported that jurors found Elizabeth McKeown, 50, guilty of first-degree murder in the death of Barbara Foster, 57. Police said McKeown was on the way to the bank to make a car payment in November 2018 when she rear-ended Foster because Foster wasn't driving fast enough.

When Foster exited her vehicle and called 911 to report the crash, police said, McKeown backed up, then ran over Foster, dragging her under the vehicle. McKeown attempted to drive away but was blocked off at the next intersection by other witness drivers.

The prosecutors said McKeown knowingly took more than the recommended amount of over-the-counter cough syrup.

McKeown's attorney Jon Van Arkel said McKeown did not purposefully take the cough syrup to "get any sort of high or euphoria, her intent was to suppress her cough."

Reward offered after vet memorial vandalized

CT WALLINGFORD — A monument in Wallingford honoring local Vietnam veterans has been the target of two acts of vandalism, police said.

A swastika was recently found spray painted across the

names of veterans on the monument in Dutton Park, police told WTIC-TV. That incident followed another in which vandals painted the word "die" on one side of the memorial and a depiction of male genitalia on the other. Authorities have offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the vandals.

"The deliberate and disgraceful attack on the memory of these heroes will not be tolerated nor with the hateful rhetoric that members of the Wallingford community have been exposed to," Police Chief John Ventura said in a statement.

Ravenous worm species disrupting ecosystem

CT NEW HAVEN — A ravenous species of earthworm has arrived in Connecticut with the potential to cause all sorts of damage to forests and wildlife.

The so-called "jumping worms" can destabilize the soil and make it harder for some plants to grow, state scientist Gale Ridge told Hearst Connecticut Media Group. They can also accumulate toxic metals like mercury and lead, which are then eaten by birds and other animals.

They don't actually jump, but have strong, rigid bodies that can whip violently if they are disturbed. They can also climb, and have been found in the upper stories of buildings.

"These are earthworms on steroids," Ridge, who works for the entomology department at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in New Haven, told the news group.

The worms, originally brought from Japan in the 1940s

to feed platypuses at the Bronx Zoo, are spread mostly through the transport of mulch, compost and potted plants, and have been found mostly along the shore and in Fairfield County.

3 teens arrested after 3 historic homes burned

GA MORROW — Police charged three boys with arson in fires that destroyed three historic homes in an Atlanta suburb.

Two 14-year-olds and one 15-year-old were arrested at their homes in Clayton County, officials in Morrow announced. All three were taken to a juvenile detention center.

The fires burned three houses, including one dating to the 1800s, in an area near Southlake Mall that Morrow spent more than \$10 million to develop as a downtown district in 2009. The development closed in late 2010 amid the pressures of the Great Recession and allegations of scandal after it was determined the structures did not meet building codes. Buildings have since been repeatedly vandalized.

The city said it will rebuild the structures, despite investigators classifying them as total losses, and is planning a prayer vigil.

School district to sell unused clear backpacks

NC CHARLOTTE — A North Carolina school district plans to auction off 46,000 unused clear backpacks as it tries to recover money it spent under a plan for increased security in schools.

The Charlotte Observer re-

ported that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg district spent almost \$500,000 on the backpacks for high school students. Critics, however, said little to no research has proven the backpacks can help stop weapons at the door. The backpacks were ultimately not used after school officials were surprised to find many of them had a warning label about cancer-causing chemicals while unpacking them.

The Board of Education is expected to approve selling the backpacks and other surplus property via online bids.

State produces record 2.5M gallons of syrup

VT MONTPELIER — The nation had a sweet maple season this year, producing more than 5 million gallons of maple syrup, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Vermont — the country's top maple producer — yielded a record 2.5 million gallons, an increase of 800,000 gallons from 2021.

"This year's record level of maple production is good news for our sugar makers and our economy," Vermont Gov. Phil Scott said.

The other top producing states were New York with 845,000 gallons, followed by Maine with 672,000 gallons, the USDA said.

Vermont's record production was helped by the addition of more taps and a longer season.

All told, Vermont producers installed 150,000 more taps in maple trees this year for a total of 6.6 million taps. The average season in the state was 40 days compared to 28 days last year.

— From wire reports



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Warriors move within 1 win of NBA title

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Exhibiting a determined confidence and grit all game, Andrew Wiggins single-handedly took the pressure off Stephen Curry and delivered the best game yet of his eight-year career.

Now, the first-time All-Star is on the cusp of becoming a first-time NBA champion — and helping Curry capture yet another title.

“It’s something I dreamt about for sure, being in the league, and this is the ultimate stage,” Wiggins said. “It doesn’t get bigger than this.”

Wiggins had 26 points and 13 rebounds, Klay Thompson scored 21 points and the Golden State Warriors beat the Boston Celtics 104-94 on Monday night for a 3-2 NBA Finals lead.

“Coming into this year, he was an All-Star starter for a reason,” Draymond Green said. “... The bigger the challenge has been that we’ve thrown in front of him, the bigger he’s responded. You want a guy like that. When the stage gets big, they respond and play their best basketball, and that’s what

he’s been doing.”

One game after his 43-point performance, Curry contributed 16 points and eight assists but was 0-for-9 from three-point range. The career three-point leader’s NBA-record streak of 132 straight postseason games with at least one three ended, along with his NBA-best run of 233 consecutive games with a three between regular season and playoffs combined.

“Uh, keep shooting, very simple,” Curry said, grinning. “I’m not afraid to go 0-fer or whatever because I’m going to keep shooting.”

Green knows how Curry will respond: “He’s going to be livid going into Game 6. That’s exactly what we need.”

Capping his brilliant performance on both ends, Wiggins drove through the lane for an emphatic one-handed slam with 2:10 left.

“Bottom line is he’s just having fun playing basketball,” Curry said.

The Warriors can win their fourth title in eight years when the series resumes in Boston on

Thursday night. If the Celtics can win at home, the series will return to the Bay Area for a winner-take-all Game 7 on Sunday. All five games so far have been decided by 10 or more points.

Jayson Tatum had 27 points and 10 rebounds for the Celtics, who lost consecutive games for the first time in the postseason. Marcus Smart was whistled for a technical foul then an offensive foul in a one-second span early in the fourth. He overcame a slow start to score 20 points.

Jordan Poole knocked down a 33-foot three from the left wing to beat the third-quarter buzzer as the Warriors took a 75-74 lead into the final 12 minutes after the Celtics roared back in the third.

The Celtics found their own third-quarter magic that has long defined Golden State’s success in the second half. Boston trailed 51-39 at the break before charging back with a 35-point outburst in the third.

Al Horford hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 6:28 left in the period that made it 58-55 as

the Celtics finally found their shooting groove from deep. Boston made eight straight threes after missing its first 12.

Jaylen Brown was 2-for-11 to start the game and finished with 18 points on 5-for-18 shooting and missed all five of his three-point tries.

Tatum gave Boston its first three-pointer on the night 4:34 before halftime and the Celtics wound up 11-for-32 from deep overall. The Celtics were sloppy in stretches, committing 18 turnovers.

Golden State wound up 9-for-40 from beyond the arc — Wiggins 0-for-6. Curry didn’t make a three-pointer for the first time since going 0-for-4 in a 134-111 loss to the Bucks on Nov. 18, 2018.

Silver sidelined

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver missed the game, entering the league’s health and safety protocols.

The NBA didn’t offer further details, such as specifying whether Silver tested positive for COVID-19 or was a close contact with someone who had.

Avs, Bolts set for anticipated clash in Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

Steven Stamkos watched the Colorado Avalanche the past few years and figured he and the Tampa Bay Lightning would see them in the Stanley Cup Final before this.

The Lightning are back, looking for the NHL’s first threepeat in almost 40 years, and the Colorado core led by Nathan MacKinnon is finally playing for the Cup following a series of crushing playoff disappointments. A potentially epic best-of-seven series between the two-time defending champions and hockey’s best in the West begins with Game 1 on Wednesday night in Denver.

Stamkos called the Ava-

lanche “probably the best team in the league” and knows the Lightning will have their hands full slowing the offensive juggernaut that leads the postseason in scoring.

“There’s no secret that they have some electric players,” Stamkos said Saturday night after Tampa Bay closed out the New York Rangers in six games in the Eastern Conference finals. “Now they’ve broken through. They just have an unbelievable mix of veteran presence, star power, grinders, a goalie. A huge challenge for us.”

It’s perhaps the biggest challenge yet for the Lightning since this unprecedented run of playoff success in the salary cap

era began two years ago. Tampa Bay isn’t just the first team to go to the Final three consecutive years since the cap was put into place in 2005, but the first in league history since Wayne Gretzky’s Edmonton Oilers from 1983-85.

The Lightning are looking to become the first team to threepeat since the New York Islanders won the Cup four consecutive times from 1980-83.

This is Tampa Bay’s fourth trip to the Final since 2015. Stamkos, top defenseman Victor Hedman, wingers Nikita Kucherov, Ondrej Palat and Alex Killorn, goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy and coach Jon Cooper have been around for all

of it, from the loss to Chicago seven years ago to two East finals exits, an embarrassing first-round sweep after the best regular season in league history and the back-to-back championships.

MacKinnon, Gabriel Landeskog, Mikko Rantanen and the Avs have until this point only experienced the playoff low, bowing out in the first or second round each of the past four years while the Lightning were making long runs.

The Avalanche have come a long way in the decade-plus since defenseman Erik Johnson arrived at the start of a seven-year run with just one playoff appearance.

Lefty not giving up on playing PGA Tour

Associated Press

BROOKLINE, Mass. — Phil Mickelson stuck to his script and showed restraint when put in tough spots at the U.S. Open, a big change for him. Except on Monday, he was using words instead of his golf clubs.

Still to come is the major reputed to be the toughest test in golf, the only one keeping him from joining golf's most elite group with the career Grand Slam. And this one figures to be far different from any other Mickelson has faced.

The six-time major champion is competing on American soil for the first time in more than four months, now the face of a Saudi-funded league that aims to disrupt the PGA Tour.

At risk is his popularity built up over 30 years for his wins and losses, equally memorable.

"In regards to if fans would leave or whatnot, I respect and I understand their opinions, and I understand that they have strong feelings and strong emotions regarding this choice," Mickelson said. "And I respect that."

He added nothing from his

comments last week outside London, where Mickelson, Dustin Johnson and 15 others defied PGA Tour regulations by competing in Greg Norman's new LIV Golf series that paid Lefty a reported \$200 million just for signing up.

Mickelson said while tour players have been suspended — some of them resigned before the opening tee shot last week — he hasn't ruled out playing the PGA Tour again. He said Monday that should be his decision.

"I've worked hard to earn a lifetime membership," said Mickelson, whose six majors are part of his 45 career tour victories. "I've worked hard to give back to the PGA Tour and the game of golf throughout my 30-plus years of professional golf, and I've earned that lifetime membership, so I believe that it should be my choice."

He was dressed in a black shirt with his personal logo — an image of him leaping on the 18th green at Augusta National with his arms in the air from winning the 2004 Masters for his first major. He still has that scruffy beard, no hat, and he took questions for 25 min-

utes.

But he was halting in speech at times, often looking down at his feet before answering, the words not flowing as easily as they usually do. He became irritated when he felt reporters were asking more than one question.

Anything related to his future on the PGA Tour he felt would be speculation. Any changes to U.S. Open criteria was not for him to say publicly.

Mickelson earned a five-year exemption from winning the PGA Championship last year at age 50, becoming the oldest player to win a major.

As for his legacy, he said he appreciated what the PGA Tour has done for him and "I'm excited about the opportunity that LIV Golf presents for me."

"I think that there is an obvious incredible financial commitment," he said.

Otherwise, he took a straight path.

For the legion of fans who are angry at him for taking Saudi Arabian money to play in a rival golf league, he understands emotions run high and he respects their

opinions.

For the families of those who died in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks — all but four of the 19 hijackers were Saudi citizens — he expressed deepest empathy even as a victims' group demands Mickelson and others leave the Saudi-funded LIV Golf series.

Asked if he felt he needed to apologize for being part of the Saudi-backed circuit, Mickelson declined to take the bait.

"There's a lot of things throughout the years that the PGA Tour has done that I agree with, and there's a lot of things that I don't agree with, and yet I've supported them either way," he said.

Other opinions he had about the tour or any other governing body he said he would keep private "because it was one of the biggest mistakes I've made is voicing all of these little things."

That's what started all this.

Mickelson was quoted by Golf Digest in February as referring to the "obnoxious greed" of the PGA Tour while he was in Saudi Arabia getting a seven-figure appearance fee.

Auburn, Stanford nab last 2 berths in College World Series

Associated Press

The College World Series again will have a strong Southeastern Conference flavor after Auburn became the fourth SEC team to make the NCAA baseball tournament's final eight.

The Tigers knocked off No. 3 national seed Oregon State 4-3 on the road Monday night to win their best-of-three super regional and lock up the last spot in the CWS.

No. 2 Stanford also won the deciding game in its home super regional, beating UConn 10-5 to earn a second straight trip to the CWS.

The CWS opens at Charles Schwab Field in Omaha, Neb., on Friday with No. 5 Texas A&M (42-18) playing Oklahoma (42-22) in the afternoon and No.

9 Texas (47-20) meeting Notre Dame (40-15) at night.

Opens Saturday match Stanford (47-16) against Arkansas (43-19) and Mississippi (37-22) against No. 14 Auburn (42-20).

At least three SEC teams have made every CWS since 2014, and this will be the third time since 2015 and fifth time overall that four have advanced.

In a year Tennessee was thought to be a lock for the CWS — Notre Dame knocked out the No. 1 Vols in super regionals — all four SEC teams (Texas A&M, Arkansas, Mississippi and Auburn) come from the West Division. The SEC has won seven national titles since 2009.

The tournament went mostly

according to form in regionals, but super regionals were full of surprises. Only two of the top eight national seeds made it to Omaha, the fewest since 2014. Four of the top 16 national seeds advanced, the fewest since the NCAA expanded seeding to 16 teams in 2018.

Mississippi's first appearance since 2014 extends the streak of at least one No. 3 regional seed making the CWS to five straight.

Kody Huff's grand slam in a six-run fourth inning broke open a close game for the Cardinal, who swept the Pac-12 regular-season and tournament titles and won a hard-earned regional before taking two of three from UConn.

They've won 22 of their past

24 and are among three teams in tournament history to score at least eight runs in all three of their super regional games. Stanford has hit a tournament-leading 22 homers in eight games.

Auburn, which had a losing record last season and was picked last in the West in the SEC preseason coaches' poll, never trailed in the deciding game of the super regional.

Sonny DiChiara homered in the third inning to put Auburn in front, and it was 4-1 in the sixth when Bobby Peirce scored on a safety squeeze. After Oregon State pulled within a run in the seventh, Auburn called on Blake Burkhalter. The star closer struck out five and allowed no hits in 2⅓ innings.

Braves beat Nats for 12th straight win

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Dansby Swanson and the Atlanta Braves won their 12th straight game Monday night, beating the Washington Nationals 9-5 despite losing All-Star second baseman Ozzie Albies to a broken left foot.

Swanson hit one of Atlanta's season-high five homers and drove in four runs. Marcell Ozuna and Adam Duvall launched back-to-back homers for the defending World Series champions, whose winning streak is the longest in the majors this

season.

"We've been swinging the bats really well," Swanson said. "We've got a lot of guys. It's a deep lineup and we just continue to come at you 1 through 9."

The stretch is Atlanta's best since it won 14 consecutive games from July 26 to Aug. 9, 2013.

Michael Harris hit his first career home run and Travis d'Arnaud also went deep for the Braves, who have 27 homers during their winning streak.

The start was delayed 93 minutes by rain.

Albies fell on his way out of the batter's box on a groundout to shortstop in the fifth inning. He exited the game, and the team later announced he has a fractured left foot.

"Hate it for Ozzie. Hate it for us," said Braves manager Brian Snitker, who didn't know how long Albies will be sidelined. "He'll be fine. He's young, he'll heal quick. Like I said, I just hate it for the kid because he loves to play baseball and he's such a big part of our club. It's a chance for somebody else to do something good."

Nationals starter Erasmo Ramirez (1-1) was a late replacement for Josiah Gray, who had warmed up in the bullpen before the rain delay. Ramirez allowed six runs and six hits over three innings in his first start since 2018.

"I thought Erasmo gave us some length. He really did," Nationals manager Dave Martinez said. "I thanked him for it because it was a tough situation. Twenty minutes before the game you're getting told you're gonna start. He gave us everything he had."

Hoskins' double in 9th lifts Phils over Marlins

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Rhys Hoskins raised his arms in celebration after his game-ending RBI double in the ninth inning that led the Philadelphia Phillies over the Miami Marlins 3-2 on Monday night.

Hoskins' two-out hit off Anthony Bass (1-3) scored Matt Vierling and capped a Phillies rally from a 2-1 hole in the seventh. Vierling hit a one-out single and stole second base to get into scoring position.

The Phillies have won 10 of 11 games to streak into NL wildcard contention.

Seranthony Dominguez (4-1) tossed a scoreless ninth for the win.

The Marlins led 2-1 and were in control behind ace Sandy Alcantara. Alcantara walked two runners to open the eighth but got slumping catcher J.T. Realmuto to ground into a double play. Alcantara was yanked and repeatedly slammed his mitt into water bottles in the dugout.

Twins 3, Mariners 2: Byron Buxton belted his 18th home run, Chris Archer delivered another steady pitching performance and visiting Minnesota defeated Seattle.

Buxton, fresh off an American

League player of the week award, hit a two-run shot to right-center field off Chris Flexen (2-8) in the first inning. It was his fourth home run in five games against Seattle this season. In his last eight games versus the Mariners, Buxton is 15-for-32 with six homers.

White Sox 9, Tigers 5: Jose Abreu hit a pair of two-run homers and Luis Robert singled home the go-ahead run in the fifth inning to help visiting Chicago beat Detroit.

White Sox right-hander Lance Lynn made his season debut, coming back from surgery on his right knee, and gave up three runs on 10 hits over 4⅓ innings. Lynn had a heated exchange with Chicago third base coach Joe McEwing in the dugout after the second inning.

Padres 4, Cubs 1: Yu Darvish pitched a season-high eight innings of five-hit ball, Manny Machado hit a tiebreaking single and Eric Hosmer had a two-run double to cap a three-run eighth inning as visiting San Diego beat Chicago.

Darvish (6-3), pitching at Wrigley Field for the first time since the Cubs traded him to the Padres as the centerpiece of a seven-player trade on Dec. 29, 2020,

didn't allow a runner past second base after Yan Gomes hit a home run in the second. Taylor Rogers pitched a perfect ninth inning for his 19th save.

Cardinals 7, Pirates 5: Paul Goldschmidt hit a tiebreaking homer in the seventh inning and Dylan Carlson added a three-run blast to help host St. Louis rally past Pittsburgh.

Brendan Donovan added a two-run double for St. Louis, which rallied from a 5-0 deficit. St. Louis has won six of seven against its NL Central rival this season.

Blue Jays 11, Orioles 1: Alek Manoah pitched six shutout innings to extend his streak to 12, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. homered and had three RBIs, and host Toronto beat Baltimore.

Santiago Espinal had two hits and drove in three runs as the Blue Jays pounded out a season-high 19 hits, including seven in a seven-run fifth inning.

Giants 6, Royals 2: Alex Wood pitched four-hit ball over six innings for his first win in more than a month, and host San Francisco beat Kansas City.

Thairo Estrada hit a tiebreaking RBI single in the sixth and Brandon Crawford doubled in two runs, lifting the Giants to

their fourth straight win and sixth in eight games. Austin Slater walked twice and scored twice.

Rangers 5, Astros 3: Brad Miller grounded an RBI single through a drawn-in infield for the go-ahead run in the eighth inning and host Texas beat AL West-leading Houston for its third consecutive victory.

Jonah Heim greeted reliever Héctor Neris (1-3) with a single to open the three-run eighth before pinch-runner Charlie Culberson stole second base and advanced on a grounder. Ezequiel Durán drove him home with a tying single, then the rookie third baseman had his first career stolen base and went to third on a wild pitch before Miller's hit.

Reds 5, Diamondbacks 4: Brandon Drury hit a tying three-run homer in the fifth inning, Mike Moustakas added a go-ahead single in the sixth and visiting Cincinnati rallied past Arizona.

Drury's 12th home run came off Merrill Kelly (5-4) and tied it at 4. The next inning, Matt Reynolds beat out an infield hit, stole second and scored when Moustakas dropped a broken-bat bloop down the right-field line.