

Carrier captain counters Houthi claims

Associated Press

ABOARD THE USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER IN THE RED SEA — The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower may be one of the oldest aircraft carriers in the U.S. Navy, but it's still fighting — despite repeated false claims by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The Houthis and social media accounts supporting them repeatedly have falsely claimed they hit or even sank the carrier in the Red Sea. The carrier leads the U.S. response to the rebels' targeting of commercial vessels and warships in the crucial waterway — attacks the Houthis say are aimed at bringing an end to the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

The Eisenhower's leader, Capt. Christopher "Chowdah" Hill, is creatively striking back on social media to counter the misinformation — and boost the morale of the ship's 5,000 personnel — as the Navy faces its most intense combat since World War II.

"I think it's been about two or three times in the past six months we've allegedly been sunk, which we have not been," Hill told The Associated Press during a recent visit to the carrier. "It is almost comical at this point. They're attempting to maybe inspire themselves through misinformation, but it doesn't work on us."

The visit by two AP journalists and others

to the Eisenhower represents part of the effort the Navy has made to try to counter the Houthi claims. While on board for about a day and a half, journalists escorted by sailors crisscrossed the nuclear-powered ship's 1,092-foot length. AP journalists also repeatedly circled the Eisenhower from the air in a Seahawk helicopter.

Other than rust on its side from the hot, humid Red Sea air and water apparently leaking from a pipe in a dining room, the ship appeared no worse for wear. Its flight deck bore no blast damage or gaping holes, just the stink of jet fuel, pooled puddles of oily water and the scream of engines before its F/A-18 fighter jets took flight.

The other half of the information warfare effort has been Hill himself, a native of Quincy, Mass., something noticeable immediately in his South Boston accent. While even the secretive leader of the Houthis, Abdul Malik al-Houthi, has name-dropped the carrier in speeches while making false claims about the vessel, Hill has offered ceaselessly positive messages online about his sailors on board.

Videos of flight operations from the bridge and images of sailors eating cookies in the captain's chair are constant staples. After one false Houthi claim, Hill responded by posting images of cinnamon rolls

and muffins in the bakery on board the Eisenhower — a subtle jab at the claims.

"The whole intent of the social media outreach was to connect with families, to bring them closer to the ship," Hill said. "So if I can post pictures of sons and daughters, husbands and wives out here, or even fathers and mothers, get it out there, it just kind of brings the family closer to us."

"And again, that's our support network. But it also took on another role because everyone else was watching to see what we're doing."

Then there's the "Star Wars" memes and images of Captain Demo, the Labrador-golden retriever mix who roams the ship as a support animal for sailors. And as far as the Houthi forces watching his postings, Hill takes special pleasure in writing about "Taco Tuesday" on the ship.

"We're going to celebrate 'Taco Tuesdays' because it's my absolute favorite day of the week. That will never end," the captain said. "If you call that an information warfare campaign, you can. It's just who I am, you know, at the end of the day."

But morale remains a deep concern for Hill and other leaders on board the ship. The Eisenhower and its allied ships have gotten just one short port call during the eight-month rotation so far to Greece.

Report calls out pace of DOD fielding new weapons

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military takes too much time to get new weapons in the hands of troops and needs "a wholesale shift" to maintain its edge, a federal watchdog agency said this week.

The Defense Department "remains alarmingly slow in delivering new and innovative weapon system capabilities, even as national security threats continue to evolve," the Government Accountability Office said in its annual report on weapons systems, which was released Monday.

The report highlighted the risks posed by artificial intelligence, autonomous systems and China's growing capabilities.

The GAO examined more than 100 of the

Pentagon's most expensive weapons, which together are expected to cost more than \$2 trillion to develop and acquire.

The average major acquisition program takes more than a decade for a system to be fielded in its initial phase, "a time frame incompatible with maintaining military advantage in an environment shaped by the needs of technological advantages," the report said.

The agency did credit the DOD for working on making its processes more efficient.

Meanwhile, combatant commanders are developing smaller units built to function more like a technology startup company.

For example, the Navy's Task Force 66 in Italy rolled out recently to develop drones and other technology, while the Air Force has similar goals at its Task Force 99 in Qatar.

Nevertheless, the GAO report follows long-standing concerns that the Pentagon acquisition process is overly bureaucratic.

Several programs have lagged since last year's report.

Meanwhile, software has become one of the most important components of weapon systems and the military's ability to compete is determined increasingly by how rapidly it can develop and deliver software-intensive systems, the GAO said.

However, DOD programs often have struggled to hire and retain people with sufficient software expertise, according to the report.

The DOD responded that it mostly agreed with three recommendations by the GAO to improve development practices.

US: Philippine treaty applies to clash with China

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Chinese forces seized two Philippine rubber boats that were delivering food and other supplies to a military outpost in a disputed South China Sea shoal in a tense confrontation in which some Filipino navy personnel were injured, Philippine security officials said Tuesday.

The United States renewed a warning Tuesday that it is obligated to defend the Philippines, a treaty ally, a day after the hourslong hostilities in Second Thomas Shoal. The shoal has been occupied by a small Philippine navy contingent aboard a long-grounded warship that has been closely monitored by China's coast guard and navy in a yearslong territorial standoff.

There is fear that territorial disputes in the South China Sea, long regarded as an Asian flashpoint, could escalate and pit the United States and China in a larger conflict. China and the Philippines blamed each other for Monday's hostilities, the most serious in recent months, but provided few details.

A Philippine government task force overseeing the territorial disputes condemned what it said were "dangerous maneuvers, including ramming and towing" which disrupted an effort to transport food, water and other supplies to the Filipinos manning the territorial outpost on the grounded ship, the BRP Sierra Madre, at the shoal. It did not elaborate.

Two Philippine security offi-

cials, who had knowledge of the supply mission at the shoal, separately told The Associated Press that two rubber boats manned by Filipino navy personnel had approached the BRP Sierra Madre at the shoal to deliver fresh supplies when several Chinese coast guard personnel on speedboats arrived to disrupt the mission, sparking a scuffle and collisions.

At least eight of the Filipinos were injured in the scuffle, including one who lost a thumb, said one of the two officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were under orders not to discuss the high-seas confrontation publicly. Five of the injured sailors were rescued by one of two Philippine coast guard patrol ships that were

waiting at a distance to back up the navy's supply mission at the shoal.

China's coast guard gave a different version of the events and said the Philippines "is entirely responsible for this." It said a Philippine vessel "ignored China's repeated solemn warnings ... and dangerously approached a Chinese vessel in normal navigation in an unprofessional manner, resulting in a collision."

China's Foreign Ministry said the supply ship was accompanied by two Philippine speedboats that were attempting to deliver construction materials and other supplies to the BRP Sierra Madre. It described the Chinese coast guard's actions as "professional, restrained, reasonable and lawful."

4-power naval exercise overlaps ship collision

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Warships from the United States, Philippines, Japan and Canada held two days of drills this week in the contested South China Sea to reaffirm "the four nations' commitment to bolstering regional security and stability," according to official statements Monday.

The short exercise coincided with a collision between a Chinese coast guard vessel and a Philippine supply ship near the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

The "maritime cooperative activity" inside the Philippines' exclusive economic zone included maneuvers to test the navies' ability to work together, according to the Pacific Fleet statement on its official website Monday.

"Cooperation like this repre-

sents the centerpiece of our approach to a secure and prosperous region where aircraft and ships of all nations may fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows," the statement reads.

The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in a news release said the exercise took place in the South China Sea.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson, Canadian frigate HMCS Montreal, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force destroyer JS Kirisame and the Philippines' patrol ship BRP Andres Bonifacio joined the exercise, according to the Pacific Fleet. Ralph Johnson is assigned to Destroyer Squadron 15, the Navy's largest destroyer squadron and part of the 7th Fleet, which operates from Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan.

Valiant Shield ends with target practice on warship

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

An 11-day military exercise by the United States and Japan ended with the sinking of a decommissioned warship in the North Pacific Ocean, the U.S. Pacific Fleet announced Monday.

The forces involved in Valiant Shield sank the former amphibious transport dock USS Cleveland more than 40 nautical miles from the nearest land, according to the fleet statement posted on its website.

The exercise involved 10,000 U.S. and Japanese troops in Japan and on Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and Palau. It began June 7 and officially ended Tuesday.

Pacific Fleet officials did not respond Tuesday to phone calls and emails asking exactly where the drill happened or how the warship was sunk.

"A SINKEX generally involves air, surface and undersea military units conducting live-fire training against a physical target," the fleet statement reads.

The exercise involved all six branches of the American military, including more than 20 surface ships and 200 aircraft, U.S. Pacific Fleet spokesman Chris Loundemon said by email Monday.

"SINKEXs give participants an opportunity to gain proficiency and confidence in their weapons and systems through realistic training that cannot be duplicated in simulators," the fleet's statement said.

Another sinking exercise is planned during this summer's RIMPAC, touted by the U.S. Navy as the world's largest international maritime exercise. That drill kicks off June 27 and runs through Aug. 1.

Tens of millions on alert as heat rises

Associated Press

Extreme heat alerts affected tens of millions of people in the United States on Tuesday as cities including Chicago broke records at the start of a week of sweltering weather.

States in the Midwest started to bake Monday in what the National Weather Service called a dangerous and long duration heat wave that was expected to stretch from Iowa to Maine into at least Friday.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said Tuesday that she has activated the National Guard to assist in any heat emergencies that develop over the next several days. "This is a time of significant risk, and we're doing our best to make sure that all lives are protected," she said during a morning briefing.

Chicago broke a 1957 temperature record Monday with a high of 97 degrees Fahrenheit. Hot and muggy conditions will continue this week with peak heat indexes near 100 F at times, the National Weather Service in

Chicago said in a post on X.

Much of the Midwest and Northeast were under heat warnings or watches, with officials announcing the opening of cooling centers and urging people to limit outdoor activities when possible and to check in with family members and neighbors who may be vulnerable to the heat.

The heat has been especially dangerous in recent years in Phoenix, where 645 people died from heat-related causes in 2023, which was a record. Temperatures there hit 112 F on Saturday. Weather service forecasters said the first two weeks of June in Phoenix were the hottest start to the month on record.

A meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Phoenix, Ted Whittock, advised reducing time outdoors between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m., staying hydrated and wearing light, looser fitting clothing. More than 100 cooling centers were open in the city and surrounding county, including two new overnight ones.

DHS detects uptick in foreign terrorist threats

Bloomberg News

The Biden administration has seen increased foreign terrorist threats to the United States compared to a year ago, thanks to renewed efforts by the Islamic State and Middle East unrest tied to the Israel-Hamas war.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said his department has noticed "a resurgence in recruiting of ISIS, ISIS's public communications and efforts to galvanize individuals to divide us," using a common acronym for the Sunni Muslim insurgent group.

The warning about global threats marks a recent shift for Mayorkas and the department, which had focused on domestic violent extremism as the most pressing — and lethal — threat facing Americans over the past few years.

Mayorkas said that while his concern that domestic violent extremists are the greatest threat to the nation "certainly persists," worry about foreign terrorism is rising — hearkening back to the early days of

DHS, which was formed after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

"The threat of foreign terrorism is uppermost in our minds as well now, more so than it was last year. The war in the Middle East following the Oct. 7 attacks has heightened the threat landscape," Mayorkas told a group of Bloomberg News reporters and editors.

The Homeland Security chief also warned of growing dangers from disinformation spread by foreign actors heading into the November presidential election, which the rise of artificial intelligence has made easier to disseminate.

Russia, China, Iran and North Korea remain "four predominant actors" responsible for disinformation in the U.S., according to Mayorkas.

The goals of those pushing deliberately false information online and on social media appear to be to "exacerbate the social discord and to exploit the divisiveness" in the U.S. and to exert "electoral influence" by "the dissemination of information about particular positions and particular people," he said.

Navy uses AI-equipped drones to scan for threats

Bloomberg

The U.S. Navy is boosting its deployment of artificial intelligence that automatically detect targets after successfully testing it on underwater drones, according to defense officials.

The effort from the Pentagon's Defense Innovation Unit, a California-based office that aims to bring commercial technology into the military, has helped cut in half the time it takes to comb the ocean floor for underwater mines, said Alex Campbell, the unit's Navy service lead.

The Navy is now introducing new production contracts to expand the use of the technology

in undersea drones and explore how it can be used to identify enemy ships, planes and other threats, Campbell said.

The Navy has been testing machine learning algorithms that rely on sonar sensors to detect underwater shapes and navigate the ocean floor, according to Marine Maj. Nick Ksiazek, who works in DIU's AI portfolio and is leading the project. The Navy launched the project with the DIU two years ago, Ksiazek said.

AI models loaded onto underwater drones have mostly replaced a time-consuming chore for sailors: parsing underwater drone footage to distinguish fish

traps from explosives.

Images are sent to sailors who review them to clear commercial shipping zones or enemy waters. The AI tools have helped the Navy to use 10 fewer sailors on missions that have become two days shorter, Campbell said.

The Navy is also speeding up how quickly it can update the AI models, sending them to the drones remotely when the machines surface on the water, rather than having to remove them from the ocean altogether. Before, it would take six months to deploy such models. Now they are down to less than one week, Ksiazek said.

Successful AI models often require rapid retraining to help adapt to new terrains. Identifying objects against a sandy ocean floor is different from identifying them against a rocky ocean floor or seabed strewn with debris, Ksiazek said. The underwater drones are already deployed in the Indo-Pacific region and have participated in exercises there, he added.

"The bottom of the ocean in the Red Sea looks different from the bottom of the ocean off Hawaii," Campbell said. "Your AI has to adapt to a different ocean, and to constantly changing adversary tactics and adversary capabilities."

Muslims end Hajj with stoning, Kaaba circling

Associated Press

MINA, Saudi Arabia—Muslim pilgrims are wrapping up the Hajj, or pilgrimage, in the deadly summer heat on Tuesday with the third day of the symbolic stoning of the devil, and the last circumambulation around the Kaaba, Islam's holiest site, in the city of Mecca.

The three-day stoning ritual in Mina, a desert site outside Mecca, is among the final rites of the Hajj, and symbolizes the casting away of evil and sin. It started a day after pilgrims congregated Saturday at a sacred hill, known as Mount Arafat.

The final days of the annual Hajj coincide with Muslims around the world celebrating the Eid al-Adha holiday when Muslims with financial means commemorate Prophet Ibrahim's test of faith, when God ordered him to sacrifice his only son, by slaugh-

tering livestock and animals and distributing the meat to the poor.

The Hajj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Its rituals largely commemorate the accounts of Prophet Ibrahim and his son Prophet Ismail, Ismail's mother Hajar and Prophet Muhammad, according to the Quran, Islam's holy book. In the Islamic version, God stayed his hand and Ismail was spared.

"I am reassured. I feel comfortable," Mejahed al-Mehrabi, a Yemeni pilgrim, told The Associated Press after he was done with the third day of the stoning ritual. "Anyone who can visit the Grand Mosque (in Mecca) should do so."

The burning sun and suffocating hot weather remained Tuesday, with temperatures expected to reach 116.6 degrees Fahrenheit in Mecca and the sacred sites in and around the city, according to the Saudi National Center for

Metrology.

Many pilgrims, particularly elderly ones, were seen collapsed and in need of medical assistance because of the heat. Dozens, including 41 from Jordan, were also reported dead.

After the symbolic stoning, pilgrims head to Mecca to perform "tawaf," or circumambulation, circling the Kaaba in the Grand Mosque counterclockwise seven times. That circumambulation, known as the Farewell Tawaf, marks the end of Hajj as pilgrims prepare to leave the holy city.

Once the Hajj is over, men are expected to shave their heads, and women to snip a lock of hair in a sign of renewal.

Most of the pilgrims then leave Mecca for the city of Medina, about 210 miles away, to pray in Prophet Muhammad's tomb, the Sacred Chamber. The tomb is part of the prophet's mosque, one

of the three holiest sites in Islam, along with the Grand Mosque in Mecca and the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.

All Muslims are required to make the Hajj once in their lives if they are physically and financially able to do so. Many wealthy Muslims make the pilgrimage more than once.

More than 1.83 million Muslims performed Hajj in 2024, including more than 1.6 million pilgrims from 22 countries, and around 222,000 Saudi citizens and residents, according to Saudi Hajj authorities.

The 2024 pilgrimage came against the backdrop of the devastating Israel-Hamas war.

"I prayed first for Gaza then Yemen," said al-Mehrabi, the Yemeni pilgrim, referring to the war in the Palestinian enclave and the decade-old conflict in his home country.

Legal same-sex marriage OK'd by Thailand's senate

Associated Press

BANGKOK — Thailand's Senate voted overwhelmingly on Tuesday to approve a bill that would legalize same-sex marriage, clearing the last legislative hurdle for the country to become the first in Southeast Asia to enact such a law.

Thailand has a reputation for acceptance and inclusivity but has struggled for decades to pass a marriage equality law. Thai society largely holds conservative values, and members of the LGBTQ+ community say they face discrimination in everyday life. The government and state agencies are also historically conservative, and advocates for gender equality have had a hard time pushing lawmakers and civil servants to accept change.

Thailand will become the third place in Asia, after Taiwan and Nepal, to allow same-sex marriage. The marriage equality bill,

which grants full legal, financial and medical rights for marriage partners of any gender, sailed through the House of Representatives right before the previous parliamentary session concluded in April. It passed its final reading in the Senate on Tuesday with the approval of 130 of the 152 members in attendance, with 4 voting against it and 18 abstaining.

The bill now needs the pro forma endorsement of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, followed by its publication in the Government Gazette, which will set a date within 120 days when it becomes effective.

The timing of the Senate's vote on Tuesday, the first day of the current parliamentary session, suggests the urgency in getting the bill passed. The legislation will amend the country's Civil and Commercial Code to replace gender-specific words with gender-neutral words.

Ukraine claims its drones hit Russian oil facility

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine claimed responsibility Tuesday for an overnight drone attack on a Russian oil facility that started a massive blaze in the latest long-range strike by Kyiv's forces on a border region.

Ukraine has in recent months stepped up aerial assaults on Russian soil, targeting refineries and oil terminals in an effort to slow down the Kremlin's war machine.

Moscow's army is pressing hard along the front line in eastern Ukraine, where a shortage of troops and ammunition in the third year of war has made defenders vulnerable.

The attack set fire to an oil reservoir in Russia's Rostov region and more than 200 firefighters were at the scene, according to Rostov Gov. Vasily Golubev.

The blaze covered an area of 55,000 square feet but there were

no casualties, Russia's Emergencies Ministry said.

A Ukrainian official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to give the information to the media, said the attack was a special operation of Ukraine's Security Service, known as SBU. The drones targeted two Rostov oil depots that have 22 oil reservoirs, the official said.

It was not possible to independently confirm the claim.

Kyiv officials normally decline comment about attacks on Russian territory, though they sometimes refer obliquely to them.

Ukrainian drone developers have been extending the weapons' range for months, as Kyiv attempts to compensate for its battlefield disadvantage. The unmanned aerial vehicles are also an affordable option while Ukraine waits for the arrival of more Western military aid.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Jeter's castle may finally have buyer with discount

NY GREENWOOD LAKE — Former New York Yankees superstar Derek Jeter has found a potential buyer for his New York castle after the sprawling lakefront property had its price tag slashed by more than half.

The property, known as Tiedemann Castle, went into contract with a buyer in late May after the asking price was lowered to \$6.3 million. It was first listed around about six years ago for more than \$14 million and had at one point failed to sell at auction.

The home in Greenwood Lake, a bucolic expanse in New York near the New Jersey border, is made up of three parcels with six bedrooms and 13 bathrooms, and includes extensive gardens, a lagoon and an infinity pool, according to the listing.

Lawmakers pass budget closing \$1.4B deficit

AZ PHOENIX — Arizona lawmakers approved a bipartisan budget deal that erases a \$1.4 billion shortfall by curbing spending on higher education, trimming funding for state agencies and raiding a host of special funds.

The spending plan is the result of weeks of negotiations between Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs and Republican legislative leaders. Some conservative Republicans have said the plan still spends too much money, while some Democratic lawmakers were disappointed they were not part of the negotiations.

"This is a product of a divided government and some compromise — and sometimes if you

can't find something good in this budget, you will not find anything good in any budget," said Republican Rep. Travis Grantham of Gilbert.

In a statement, Hobbs said, "Arizonans can rest assured that their state has a balanced budget. I'm thankful for members of the legislature who came together, compromised and passed this bipartisan agreement."

2 killed when vintage plane crashes at event

CA CHINO — Two people were killed aboard a vintage plane that crashed and burst into flames near a Southern California airfield during a weekend Father's Day event hosted by an air museum, authorities said Sunday.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the twin-engine Lockheed 12A crashed shortly after 12:30 p.m. Saturday, just west of Chino Airport in San Bernardino County.

Firefighters doused the flames within 10 minutes before finding the two people dead inside, said Chino Valley Fire District Battalion Chief Bryan Turner.

Turner described the aircraft as older and historical. The plane belonged to the Yanks Air Museum, the Southern California News Group reported.

The crash occurred during the Yanks Air Pops & Props event, although it was not immediately clear whether that plane was part of the show.

Man drives stolen truck on runway behind plane

MO ST. LOUIS — A Missouri man has been charged with driving a sto-

len truck onto a runway behind a plane that had just landed at St. Louis' airport while fleeing police before eventually crashing into an officer's car.

Prosecutors say the man took a utility truck that was sitting unlocked and running and drove onto the airport through a closed security gate.

He went on to block a plane from using a taxiway before officers approached with guns drawn. He briefly exited the truck and asked officers what was going on before jumping back in and speeding away.

The man nearly struck an officer before driving onto a runway behind a plane that had just landed and sped up. Then officers used their vehicles to redirect the truck, and it spun out. But the man kept going until he crashed into a police car head on.

The man still didn't take his foot off the gas pedal until an officer pointed a rifle at him and ordered him out of the truck.

Law license suspended over conflicts of interest

KS WICHITA — A Republican Kansas lawmaker who already dropped his re-election campaign last month after he was arrested in a traffic stop has now been barred from practicing law for at least a year for mishandling conflicts of interest in a murder case.

The Kansas Supreme Court ruled that state Rep. Carl Maughan, of Colwich, violated professional standards while representing 57-year-old Bret Blevins in a 2016 crash that killed two men, according to the Kansas City Star.

Maughan did not respond im-

mediately to an email from The Associated Press on Sunday nor did he answer a phone call from the newspaper Friday. He had previously defended the way he handled the Blevins case although Blevins is now suing Maughan over it.

The conflicts of interest in the case came up because Maughan had previously represented Blevins' girlfriend, Tammy Akers, in DUI cases and he accepted \$30,000 from Akers and her husband to defend Blevins.

Man drowns trying to retrieve his keys in lake

NY HASTINGS — A man drowned in a lake in upstate New York after his keys fell into the water and he tried to retrieve them, police said.

Anthony Davis, 44, was fishing with two other men in Oneida Lake in the town of Hastings just before 10 a.m. Sunday when Davis' keys fell in the water, Lt. Andrew Bucher, of the Oswego County Sheriff's Office, said in a news release.

Davis went into the water to try to get his keys but could not make it back to land, Bucher said. One of the other men, Wattie Cappers, 42, went in after Davis but also was unable to get back to land.

Personnel from several local police and fire departments arrived and tried to rescue the two men, Bucher said.

Davis was pulled from the water by a diver from the Brewerton Fire Department and taken to a hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Cappers was rescued by Oswego sheriff's deputies and was stable at the hospital.

— From wire reports

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Celtics claim 18th NBA championship

Associated Press

BOSTON—Jayson Tatum put his hands behind his head, with TD Garden fans standing on their feet cheering around him, and took it all in.

Walking to the bench, he wrapped both arms around Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla.

The journey was complete.

The Boston Celtics again stand alone among NBA champions.

Tatum had 31 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds, and the Celtics topped the Dallas Mavericks 106-88 on Monday night to win the franchise's 18th championship, breaking a tie with the Los Angeles Lakers for the most in league history.

Boston earned its latest championship on the 16th anniversary of hoisting its previous Larry O'Brien Trophy in 2008. It marks the 13th championship won in this century by one of the city's Big 4 professional sports franchises.

"It means the world," Tatum

said on stage after the team received the trophy from NBA Commissioner Adam Silver. "It's been a long time. And damn I'm grateful."

Jaylen Brown added 21 points, eight rebounds and six assists, and was voted the NBA Finals MVP.

"I share this with my brothers and my partner in crime Jayson Tatum," Brown said after the 107th career playoff game he and Tatum have played together — the most for any duo before winning a title.

Jrue Holiday finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds. Center Kristaps Porzingis also provided an emotional lift, returning from a two-game absence because of a dislocated tendon in his left ankle to chip in five points in 17 minutes.

They helped the Celtics cap a postseason that saw them go 16-3 and finish with an 80-21 overall record. That .792 winning percentage ranks second in team history behind only the Celtics'

1985-86 championship team that finished 82-18 (.820).

Mazzulla, in his second season, at age 35 also became the youngest coach since Bill Russell in 1969 to lead a team to a championship.

"You have very few chances in life to be great," Mazzulla said.

Luka Doncic finished with 28 points and 12 rebounds for Dallas, which failed to extend the series after avoiding a sweep with a 38-point win in Game 4. The Mavericks had been 3-0 in Game 5s this postseason, with Doncic scoring at least 31 points in each of them. He said the chest, right knee and left ankle injuries he played through during the Finals weren't an excuse for Dallas struggling throughout the series.

"It doesn't matter if I was hurt, how much was I hurt. I was out there," he said. "I tried to play, but I didn't do enough."

Kyrie Irving finished with just 15 points on 5-for-16 shooting and has lost 13 of the last 14 meet-

ings against the Celtics team he left in the summer of 2019 to join the Brooklyn Nets.

Irving thinks better things are ahead for the Mavs.

"I see an opportunity for us to really build our future in a positive manner, where this is almost like a regular thing for us and we're competing for championships," he said.

NBA teams are now 0-157 in postseason series after falling into a 3-0 deficit.

Mavs coach Jason Kidd believes Doncic and his team will grow from this NBA Finals experience.

"I think the first step is just to be in it. I think that's a big thing," he said. "Yes, we lost 4-1, but I thought the group fought against the Celtics and just, unfortunately, we just couldn't make shots when we had to, or we turned the ball over and they took full advantage of that."

Boston never trailed and led by as many as 26, feeding off the energy of the Garden crowd.

Murphy, King earn Olympic berths for third time

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — It was a night for familiar names at the U.S. Olympic swimming trials.

American backstroke star Ryan Murphy is headed to his third Olympics. So is breaststroke queen Lilly King. And the most prominent name of all, Katie Ledecky, locked up a second individual race in Paris.

Let's not forget Katie Grimes, who'll be swimming indoors and outdoors at the Summer Games.

In a hectic session featuring five finals, Ledecky made it two-for-two in Indy by touching first in the 200-meter freestyle Monday.

Having already won the 400 free on the opening night of the trials, Ledecky showed her speed on the final lap to take the

victory in 1 minute, 55.22 seconds.

Still to come for Ledecky, her two best events: the 800 and 1,500 freestyle.

She'll be joined in Paris by Claire Weinstein, runner-up in the 200 free at 1:56.18. Paige Madden and Erin Gemmell are also assured of relay spots in the 4x200 free relay after finishing third and fourth, respectively, with the next two — Anna Peplowski and Alex Shackell — also in the mix for relay spots.

Murphy won the men's 100-meter backstroke to continue a run of excellence that dates to his breakout in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

The 28-year-old Floridian touched in 52.22 and now gets a chance to add to his already im-

pressive résumé, which includes four golds, one silver and one bronze.

"I'll appreciate my career a little bit more when I'm done swimming," Murphy said. "Then I can zoom out. Now I'm really zoomed in on everything I'm doing on an everyday basis."

Murphy is fired up for these Olympics after settling for a silver and a bronze in his individual races in Tokyo.

"There's definitely no shortage of motivation on my end," he said. "I want to win every time I touch the water."

Hunter Armstrong claimed the likely second Olympic spot in 52.72 — edging Jack Aikins by two-hundredths of a second.

The 27-year-old King thrilled her home-state fans at Lucas

Oil Stadium by taking the 100 breaststroke in 1:05.43. She ran around the deck afterward, hugging family members and soaking up the cheers in the cavernous home of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts.

"I had a really special moment tonight," she said. "I basked in it a little bit more than I have in the past."

King has said her third Olympics will be her last. She's already got two gold, two silvers and one bronze in her stellar career.

"I've done everything I ever wanted to do," King said.

Emma Weber was the runner-up in 1:06.10 — edging Tokyo gold medalist Lydia Jacoby by 0.27, which means the Alaska native won't get a chance to defend her title in Paris.

Prager pitches Aggies to bracket final

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Texas A&M scored all of its runs in the sixth inning, Ryan Prager held Kentucky hitless into the seventh and the Aggies are off to their best start in a College World Series after their 5-1 win Monday night.

The Aggies (51-13) are 2-0 in the CWS for the first time in eight all-time appearances and have taken control of Bracket 2. They'll await the winner of a Tuesday elimination game between Florida and Kentucky (46-15) in the bracket final Wednesday. They would have to lose twice to be kept out of the best-of-three finals.

"First two games we've been here, it's about how we drew it up," Texas A&M coach Jim Schlossnagle said.

Prager (9-1), the season-long No. 1 pitcher for A&M, wiggled

out of trouble twice before Ryan Nicholson lined the ball over second base for the Wildcats' first hit with two outs in the seventh. Nolan McCarthy followed with a double, putting runners on the corners, and then reliever Josh Stewart came on to finish the game.

"Prager, what an outing. What a time to throw a game like that," Kentucky coach Nick Mingione said. "He kept us off balance. We had some opportunities and did not cash in. In a game like this, all those opportunities matter. The big inning is just about maybe the biggest factor in whether you win or lose in college baseball. They were able to get one."

Prager, rocked for six runs in 1½ innings in his super-regional start against Oregon, threw only 10 pitches in a 1-2-3 first inning against the Wildcats, and he re-

tired 13 in a row from the second to sixth inning. The sophomore left-hander walked one, hit a batter and struck out four.

"After last week, as soon as I came out there was some frustration, but that went away pretty quick," he said. "I did some thinking, maybe over-thinking, but I came back to neutral and had an understanding of what I've done all year. I realized there doesn't have to be a drastic change in what I was doing."

Florida 5, NC State 4: Two-way star Jac Caglianone broke the program single-season home run record to give his team the lead an inning after he struggled on the mound and got pulled, and the Gators eliminated the Wolfpack.

Florida (35-29) moved to another elimination game Tuesday against Kentucky.

The Gators are 4-0 in elimina-

tion games since regionals and 8-1 in win-or-go-home games in the last two NCAA Tournaments.

Caglianone, a projected top-five pick in next month's amateur draft because of his bat, not his arm, looked like anything but his best as he labored through a 33-pitch first inning. Coach Kevin O'Sullivan opted to lift him for Cade Fisher (4-3).

Caglianone stayed in the game as the designated hitter and atoned for what happened on the mound. In the second, Caglianone drilled a low fastball from Dominic Fritton over the right-center fence for a three-run homer and 4-1 lead.

It was his 34th homer of the season, breaking his school's season record of 33 set last year, and moved him into a tie with Matt LaPorta (2004-07) for career homers at Florida with 74.

DeChambeau's US Open win magnifies golf divide

Associated Press

PINEHURST, N.C. — Bryson DeChambeau acted as though he didn't want this U.S. Open to end.

He watched his name being engraved on the silver trophy for the second time. He filled it with grains of sand from the bunker where he produced the most memorable shot on the 72nd hole of a U.S. Open since Tiger Woods made his putt at Torrey Pines to force a playoff.

And then he tried to share it with thousands of fans whom he entertained over four days at Pinehurst No. 2, wanting them to touch it and try to experience the joy he felt. Deep into the North Carolina night, he was still signing autographs.

The entertainment never stopped. He made a cameo when Johnson Wagner of Golf Channel was trying to replicate the shot, with DeChambeau doing the commentary and then

letting Wagner hoist the trophy after hitting it close.

And now he takes his talents to Tennessee for the LIV Golf event that can be seen this weekend on The CW Network.

The last big stage of the year for him is next month at Royal Troon for the British Open. A week after that, four Americans will be going to Le Golf National outside Paris for the Olympics. DeChambeau will not be one of them.

Even in the shine of a magnificent victory, DeChambeau winning the U.S. Open for the second time was a reminder of the great divide in golf and how little the best players compete against each other.

"If I'm to be quite frank, I hope we can figure things out quickly," DeChambeau said. "I hope this can bridge the gap between a divided game."

Brooks Koepka was the first LIV Golf player to win a major

at the PGA Championship last year, and along with his runner-up finish at the Masters, it was enough for him to be a logical choice as a captain's pick for the Ryder Cup.

The PGA Tour, which has suspended anyone defecting to LIV, does not operate the Ryder Cup. It does own the Presidents Cup, and DeChambeau won't be at Royal Montreal, either.

"All I want to do is entertain and do my best for the game of golf, execute and provide some awesome entertainment for the fans. From at least what I can tell, that's what the fans want, and they deserve that," DeChambeau said without a hint of animosity in his voice.

"You can say what's happened in the past, 'You were part of the reason,'" he said.

That gets overlooked at times, and Scottie Scheffler mentioned as much in March when he said the splintering in golf came

from the player who took the Saudi money to join LIV.

DeChambeau was among the first, and his name was on the antitrust lawsuit filed against the PGA Tour that was dismissed last year when the PGA Tour and the Public Investment Fund of Saudi Arabia — which pays for LIV — agreed to try to strike a commercial deal.

Those negotiations are ongoing. One of the biggest hurdles is how to reunite players who took the Saudi money with those who didn't. And that assumes LIV players even want to come back.

"Let bygones be bygones and go figure it out," DeChambeau said. "Let's figure out this amazing game that creates so much positivity back to where it belongs."

The four Americans who qualified for the Olympics are Scheffler, Schauffele, Wyndham Clark and Collin Morikawa.

Phillies slug past Padres in Turner's return

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kyle Schwarber homered twice, Trea Turner had two hits in his return to the lineup and the Philadelphia Phillies defeated the San Diego Padres 9-2 on Monday night.

Alec Bohm added a three-run homer and two singles, and Rafael Marchán had four hits and an RBI for Philadelphia, which pounded out 18 hits — seven for extra bases.

The NL East leaders were playing at home for the first time since June 5 after an eight-game, three-city, intercontinental road trip that included two games in London against the Mets.

"It felt like we were on the road for a month," Schwarber said. "It's nice to be able to get back home. It's a good start to the homestand."

Donovan Solano had an RBI double for the Padres, who have lost four straight overall and

eight in a row on the road.

Turner missed 38 games with a strained left hamstring after getting injured scoring from second base on a passed ball May 3. The four-time All-Star looked comfortable in the field and running the bases.

"I feel really good," he said before the game.

Pirates 4, Reds 1: Rookie Paul Skenes (4-0) pitched one-run ball over six innings to win his fourth straight decision and lead host Pittsburgh over Cincinnati.

Skenes (4-0) allowed six hits in six innings with seven strikeouts and one walk, lowering his ERA to 2.29. The 22-year-old right-hander has 53 strikeouts and seven walks in 39½ innings, and the Pirates are 6-1 in his starts.

Red Sox 7, Blue Jays 3: Tyler O'Neill hit two of Boston's four home runs, fellow Canadian Nick Pivetta (4-4) pitched seven innings and visiting Boston beat

Toronto for its sixth win in eight games.

One day after setting a team record with nine stolen bases, the Red Sox slugged their way to victory by going deep four times off Yusei Kikuchi, matching his career worst.

Cardinals 7, Marlins 6 (12): Rookie Masyn Winn hit a two-run homer in the 12th inning, Dylan Carlson threw out the potential tying run at the plate in the bottom half and visiting St. Louis beat Miami to move over .500 for the first time since early April.

St. Louis (36-35) won for the fifth time in six games and has a winning record for the first time since the Cardinals were 5-4 after defeating the Marlins on April 6.

Mets 14, Rangers 2: DJ Stewart hit a three-run homer, Brandon Nimmo also went deep around a bunch of singles and visiting New York extended its winning streak to six games

with a victory over Texas.

The Mets' 22 hits, only five for extra bases, were their most since getting 23 against Atlanta in August 2019. They had five players with at least three hits for the first time since August 2018 at Philadelphia.

Giants 7, Cubs 6: Thairo Estrada hit a three-run homer in the ninth inning to lift visiting San Francisco to a victory over Chicago.

Dodgers 9, Rockies 5: Shohei Ohtani had three hits, James Paxton pitched seven smooth innings and visiting Los Angeles defeated Colorado on Monday night in the opener of a four-game series between the top and bottom teams in the NL West.

Angels 5, Brewers 3: Zach Plesac pitched six innings of four-hit ball in his Angels debut and his first start in nearly 14 months, and Zach Neto hit a two-run homer in host Los Angeles' victory over Milwaukee.

Yankees-Orioles showdown could start big AL East race

Associated Press

The New York Yankees played last weekend at Fenway Park against rival Boston. The Baltimore Orioles hosted three straight sellouts against Philadelphia in a series matching two of the top teams in baseball.

And that was somehow just the undercard.

Now for the main event: Starting Tuesday night, New York hosts Baltimore for three games between the two clubs that have already opened up a big gap on the rest of the AL East. The Yankees are on pace to win 109 games, the Orioles 107. With only the division champion eligible to earn a postseason first-round bye, this could be the start of a compelling AL East title race.

"I think it should be fun," Baltimore outfielder Colton Cowser said. "I think that any chance you go into Yankee Stadium, especially with the year they're having, it's going to be a really good environment."

The tale of the tape is as follows: The Yankees (50-24) have the best record in baseball and the Orioles (47-24) are third.

The Yankees have the game's top run differential and the Orioles are second. The Orioles are No. 1 in home runs and runs per game and the Yankees are No. 2 in both categories. The Yankees lead the major leagues in ERA and the Orioles are No. 2.

Baltimore, last year's division champ, has not lost any of its past 21 series against AL East foes, going 15-0-6. That includes winning three of four over the Yankees at Camden Yards about six weeks ago.

"I think both teams have clearly established themselves as really formidable, but at the same time, it is a marathon. We've got a long way to go," New York manager Aaron Boone said. "I think right now all I can say is both teams are really good, really dangerous and have a lot of potential."

New York and Baltimore have faced significant pitching injuries — but in different ways. Reigning Cy Young Award winner Gerrit Cole hasn't pitched yet this season for the Yankees because of elbow nerve inflammation, but the rest of the rotation has stepped up and five New York pitchers have started 70 of 74 games. The Orioles

have had a healthy ace in Corbin Burnes, but the list of injuries to the rest of their staff is lengthy, with Félix Bautista, John Means and Tyler Wells out for the season and Kyle Bradish and Dean Kremer currently on the injured list.

"It's a really good team. They're very complete. They've had some injuries happen to their rotation, but their depth has served them well," Boone said.

The Orioles will start Albert Suárez, a journeyman who has posted a 1.61 ERA this year, in the series opener. Then rookie Cade Povich makes his third big league start, followed by lefty Cole Irvin.

The Yankees will start Nestor Cortes on Tuesday and will have breakout star Luis Gil on Thursday. As for Wednesday, that's now set for Cole's return, which will add even more buzz to a series that already had plenty.

"Looking forward to it, another great ballclub," Yankees slugger Aaron Judge said. "Excited to see them in the Bronx. It's going to be a fun series. The fans are going to be excited. We're looking forward to it."