

Missiles pound Ukrainian base near Poland

Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine — Waves of Russian missiles pounded a military training base in western Ukraine on Sunday, killing 35 people in an attack on a facility that has served as a crucial hub for cooperation between Ukraine and the NATO countries supporting it in its defense against Moscow's grinding assault.

More than 30 Russian cruise missiles targeted the sprawling facility, which lies not far from the border with NATO member Poland and that has long been used to train Ukrainian military personnel, often with instructors from the United States and other countries in the western alliance.

Poland is also a transit route for Western military aid to Ukraine, and the strikes followed Moscow's threats to target those shipments. An attack so close to the border was heavy

with symbolism in a conflict that has revived the old Cold War rivalries which gave birth to NATO and threatened to rewrite the current global security order.

Since Russia's invasion more than two weeks ago, thousands are thought to have been killed, both civilians and soldiers, and millions have fled their homes amid the largest land conflict in Europe since World War II. Despite its superior firepower, Russia has struggled in its advance across Ukraine, in the face of stiffer than expected Ukrainian resistance, bolstered by Western weapons support. Instead, it has besieged several cities and pummeled them with strikes, repeatedly hitting medical facilities and leading to a series of humanitarian crises.

Many civilians have been caught in the barrage, and Ukraine's Prosecutor General's office said Sunday that at least 85

children have been killed so far. An American journalist was killed and another wounded when their car was fired upon at a Russian checkpoint Sunday, according to police. Meanwhile, U.S. President Joe Biden is sending his national security adviser to Rome to meet Monday with a Chinese official amid concerns that country is amplifying Russian disinformation.

The attacked training base near Yavoriv is less than 15 miles from the closest border point with Poland, according to the governor of Ukraine's western Lviv region, and appears to be the westernmost target struck during Russia's 18-day invasion.

The base has hosted international NATO drills and a senior NATO official, Admiral Rob Bauer, previously hailed it as embodying "the spirit of military cooperation" between Ukraine and international forces.

As such, the site symbolizes Russia's longstanding concerns that the 30-member Western military alliance poses a threat to Moscow by operating so close to its territory.

One of Moscow's demands for ending the hostilities in Ukraine is for the country to drop its ambitions to join NATO.

Lviv governor Maksym Kozyskyi said most of the Russian missiles fired Sunday "were shot down because the air defense system worked." The ones that got through killed at least 35 people and wounded 134, he said.

Russian fighters also fired at the airport in the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk, which is less than 94 miles north of Romania and 155 miles from Hungary, countries that are also NATO allies. The airport, which includes a military airfield as well as a runway for civilian flights, was also targeted Friday.

US, China to meet as tensions over Russia mount

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is sending his national security adviser for talks with a senior Chinese official in Rome on Monday as concerns grow that China is amplifying Russian disinformation in the Ukraine war, and may help Russia evade punishment from economic sanctions.

The talks between national security adviser Jake Sullivan and senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Yang Jiechi will center on "efforts to manage the competition between our two countries and discuss the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine on regional and global security," said Emily Horne, speaking for the White House national security council.

The White House has accused Beijing of spreading false Russian claims that Ukraine was running chemical and biological weap-

ons labs with U.S. support. U.S. officials said China was attempting to provide cover for a potential biological or chemical weapons attack on Ukrainians by the Russian military.

Sullivan said on NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday that when Russia starts accusing other countries of preparing to launch biological or chemical attacks, "it's a good tell that they may be on the cusp of doing it themselves."

He also said China and other countries should not try to help Russia work around the sanctions, and the United States has made it clear that other countries should not bail out the Russian economy. "We will ensure that neither China nor anyone else can compensate Russia for these losses," Sullivan said.

The striking accusations about Russian disinformation and Chinese complicity came after Russian Foreign Ministry spo-

keswoman Maria Zakharova alleged with no evidence that the U.S. was financing Ukrainian chemical and biological weapons labs.

The Russian claim was echoed by Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian, who claimed there were 26 bio-labs and related facilities in "which the U.S. Department of Defense has absolute control." The United Nations has said it has received no information backing up such accusations.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki last week called the claims "preposterous."

"Now that Russia has made these false claims, and China has seemingly endorsed this propaganda, we should all be on the lookout for Russia to possibly use chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, or to create a false flag operation using them," Psaki tweeted Wednesday night. "It's a clear pattern."

Russian Mideast, Africa inroads a threat to NATO

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine dominates world attention. But with less global scrutiny, Putin is also busy advancing Russia's presence in the Middle East and Africa — an expansion that military and civilian leaders view as another, if less immediate, threat to security in the West.

Putin's strategy in the Mideast and Africa has been simple, and successful: He seeks out security alliances with autocrats, coup leaders, and others who have been spurned or neglected by the U.S. and Europe, either because of their abuses or competing Western strategic interests.

■ In Syria, Russia's defense minister last month showed off nuclear-capable bombers and hypersonic missiles over the Mediterranean, part of a security partnership that now has the Kremlin threatening to send Syrian fighters to Ukraine.

■ In Sudan, a leader of a junta that's seized power in that East African country has a new economic alliance with the Kremlin,

reviving Russia's dreams of a naval base on the Red Sea.

■ In Mali, the government is the latest of more than a dozen resource-rich African nations to forge security alliances with Kremlin-allied mercenaries, according to U.S. officials.

Especially in the past five or six years, "what you've seen is a Russia that is much more expeditionary and casting its military power further and wider afield," retired U.S. Gen. Philip M. Breedlove told The Associated Press.

"Russia is trying to show itself as a great power, as at the seat in world affairs, as driving international situations," said Breedlove, the top NATO commander from 2013 through 2016, and now a distinguished chair at the Middle East Institute in Washington.

But with Putin's hands already full battling the fierce resistance from a much weaker Ukrainian military, experts view his expansionist goals in the Middle East and Africa as a potential long-term threat, not a present danger to Europe or the NATO alliance.

"It's threatening NATO from

below," Kristina Kausch, a European security expert at the German Marshall Fund think-tank, said of the leverage Russia is gaining. "The Russians have felt encircled by NATO — and now they want to encircle NATO," she said.

To achieve its strategic aims, Russia provides conventional military or Kremlin-allied mercenaries to protect the regimes of often outcast leaders. In return, these leaders pay back Russia in several ways: cash or natural resources, influence in their affairs, and staging grounds for Russian fighters. These alliances help advance Putin's ambitions of returning Russia's influence to its old Cold War boundaries.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday that Russia would bring recruits from Syria to fight in Ukraine. The threat was seen primarily as an intimidation tactic and U.S. officials say there's been no sign of Syrian recruits in Ukraine. Some security experts say Russian mercenaries are using Mali as a staging ground for deployment to Ukraine, but U.S. officials have not confirmed that.

Regardless of how imminent the threat is, U.S. and European leaders are paying increasing attention to Putin's moves in the Middle East and Africa — and Russia's growing alliance with China — as they formulate plans to protect the West.

On the eve of Russia's invasion with Ukraine, Kremlin officials met in Moscow with an officer of a military junta that seized power in Sudan. Isolated by the West, Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo responded to Russia's overture of a new economic-focused alliance. Upon returning home, Dagolo announced that Sudan would be open to allowing Russia to build its long-hoped-for naval base at Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

A Red Sea port could help give Russia a greater role in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, increase its access in the Suez Canal and other shipping lanes, and allow Russia to project force in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.

"They certainly could create enough havoc to cause problems," said Breedlove, the former NATO commander.

US Marines, Japanese build alliance in drills on beach

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

NUMAZU BEACH, Japan — U.S. Marines piled out of their landing craft and onto the rocky shore near Mount Fuji to simulate an amphibious landing Wednesday, part of monthlong exercises with their counterparts in the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force.

The landing exercise was a departure for the Marines, who for decades rarely visited the Numazu Beach Training Area at Combined Arms Training Center Camp Fuji, part of a 34,000-acre military reservation at the foot of its namesake mountain. But that attitude is changing, along with

the arms-length relationship the Marines held with their Camp Fuji neighbors, the Japan Self-Defense Forces. The two are rebuilding their relationship as China asserts a claim of dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.

"Before last year, we had really not been using this beach to train for about a 30-year period," Camp Fuji commander Col. Robert Bodisch told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday. "Last year, we started using the beach more — that was one of my lines of effort to try and modernize our training environment."

Bodisch, who took command of Camp Fuji in 2020, said modernizing Fuji's training re-

giments and building a closer relationship with the Self-Defense Forces are his primary goals.

The event, dubbed Maritime Defense Exercise-Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, launched March 6 and is scheduled to conclude March 25. Along with the training and support units at Camp Fuji, the exercise participants include elements of the III Marine Expeditionary Force and the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade of the Ground Self-Defense Force.

On Wednesday, members of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit landed on the beach aboard a craft dispatched from the dock landing ship USS Ashland. Seven

Joint Light Tactical Vehicles rumbled off the boat and stood watch over the Marines unloading their gear.

Col. Rikiya Kondo, commander of Japan's Fuji Training Center, stood nearby with a contingent of Japanese officers. Kondo told Stars and Stripes that he shares Bodisch's goal for a stronger relationship between their respective forces, one that will produce innovative practices.

"My understanding is that we need to challenge new capabilities in a totally new operating environment; this is something different from what I expected," Kondo said. "We need to create a new way of amphibious assault."

Navy surgeon, guitarist was real 'Iceman'

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Iceman had his hand on the ejection handle and was ready to punch out after an engine fire broke out on his F-4 Phantom flying with afterburners shortly after take-off.

But this was no scene from the 1986 blockbuster film "Top Gun."

Former Navy flight surgeon Deniz Tek, 69, of Hawaii, was the Iceman before actor Val Kilmer made a character with the same call sign legendary.

The flying doctor grew up in Ann Arbor, Mich., where he listened to rock bands like The Stooges and The Rolling Stones, he told Stars and Stripes by phone in February. In 1972, he moved to Sydney to study medicine at Australia's University of New South Wales and started playing in local bands.

From 1974 to 1978, he played "high-energy rock" guitar in Radio Birdman, which amassed a cult following and was inducted into the Australian Recording Industry Association Hall of Fame in 2007.

After returning to the United States, Tek joined the Navy in 1981 as a flight surgeon, flying in the back seat of F-4 Phantom jets with Marine Fighter Attack Squadrons 212 and 232 out of Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii.

His link to "Top Gun," whose sequel, "Top Gun Maverick," opens in theaters in May, goes back to research the filmmakers

did with the Marine Corps, Tek said.

"They sent a team to our squadron and stayed with us for two weeks and took notes and photographs and spoke to us," he said. "I interacted with them."

A year later, "Top Gun" was released featuring Kilmer in the role of Lt. Tom "Iceman" Kazansky, a rival of Lt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell, played by Tom Cruise.

Photographs of Tek from his time in service show him with flight helmets bearing his "Iceman" call sign.

It's been an "urban myth" that the character is based on Tek, he said.

One of his old pals, Phil "Dust" Peterson, a retired Marine AH-1 Cobra helicopter pilot, was certain that Iceman was based on Tek.

"The characters seem so similar," Peterson, 72, of Falconer, N.Y., told Stars and Stripes by phone March 3. "He was even more intense than the movie Iceman."

One of the film's screenwriters, Jack Epps Jr., however, told Stars and Stripes that the character isn't based on a real person.

"No, the character was not based on any individual," he said in a March 4 email.

Navy and Marine aviators are given call signs on their first operational deployment, Tek said.

"They have a meeting of the call sign committee, and they give the new guys their

call signs," he said. "You can't change it. It becomes your call sign for your career."

Iceman refers to Tek's failure to laugh at jokes that were repeated over and over by his comrades, he said.

"I got a reputation for not having a great sense of humor, which is wrong, because I do," he said.

Most of his flying was routine, Tek said, but on one mission flying from Kaneohe Bay in late 1984, his F-4 Phantom was on full afterburner when an explosion rocked the jet.

"We had an engine fire, and I had my hand on the ejection handle and ready to get us both out of there," he said. "But we went through our emergency checklist and pulled all the relative circuit breakers, and the fire went out and we were still flying."

The Phantom had a large black hole billowing smoke in front of the engine but it limped back to base and landed safely after burning up most of its fuel, Tek said.

After leaving the Navy in 1989, the former lieutenant commander worked in emergency medicine and continued his music career. These days he's living on Hawaii, where he grows coffee on a small farm.

"Up until COVID hit, I had been doing 50 to 60 shows a year," he said. "I'm still recording. I have a new solo album called 'Long Before Day' coming out that was recorded in Montana."

Navy revives program to diversify officer candidates

By JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

The Navy, as part of a move since summer 2020 to diversify its ranks, has reinstated its Baccalaureate Degree Completion Program, partly as a means of attracting officer candidates from minority communities.

The program is set up to assist college students and graduates who want to become commissioned officers, the Navy Recruiting Command announced March 7.

The program helps qualified applicants complete their final two years of college on their way to a naval commission. Applicants must be U.S. citizens, at least 19 years old and already have at least 60 semester or 90 quarter hours of credit from an accredited college or university.

If accepted into the program, candidates must complete the requirements for a bachelor's degree within 24 months, according to the command. There are other qualifying

factors, including age limits and a minimum 2.8 GPA on a 4.0 scale.

The Navy phased out the program in 2003 due to budgetary considerations and replaced it with other programs, including several pre-service and post-enlistment programs that allowed students to receive financial incentives, food and housing while attending the Navy's training schools.

The bachelor's degree program was one effort to diversify the service by providing more opportunities to minorities to succeed, according to the Navy.

"Bringing [the degree completion program] back widens the talent pool in our officer ranks by offering opportunities to students at universities without an existing NROTC program," recruiting command spokesman Cmdr. Dave Benham said in an email Thursday to Stars and Stripes.

Reinstating the program was one of about 60 recommendations in a 142-page report

released in January 2021 by Task Force One Navy. It looked for ways to enhance diversity in the service by soliciting feedback from hundreds of sailors through focus groups and surveys.

Task Force One Navy arose at Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday's direction in July 2020 following nationwide protests over U.S. race relations in spring and summer that year, the report states.

The report found that the bachelor's degree program had previously "produced opportunities for minorities seeking a commission" and provided financial assistance to help them achieve that goal.

The program allows students to commission as officers in surface warfare, special warfare, explosive ordnance disposal and as naval pilots and flight officers. It is also available to sailors in the active or inactive Navy Reserve and other reserve service branches.

US pays \$2M a month to protect Pompeo, top aide

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The State Department says it's paying more than \$2 million per month to provide 24-hour security to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and a former top aide, both of whom face "serious and credible" threats from Iran.

The department told Congress in a report that the cost of protecting Pompeo and former Iran envoy Brian Hook between August 2021 and February 2022 amounted to \$13.1 million. The report, dated Feb. 14 and marked "sensitive but unclassified," was obtained by The Associated Press on Saturday.

Pompeo and Hook led the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran and the report says U.S. intelligence assesses that the threats to them have remained constant since they left government and could intensify. The threats have persisted even as President Joe Biden's administration has been engaged in indirect negotiations with Iran over a U.S. return to a landmark 2015 nuclear deal.

As a former secretary of state, Pompeo was automatically given 180 days of protection by the State Department's Bureau of Diplomatic Security after leaving office. But that protection has been repeatedly extended in 60-day increments by Secretary of State Antony Blinken due to "a serious and credible threat from a foreign power or agent of a foreign power arising from duties performed by former Secretary Pompeo while employed by the department," the report said.

Hook, who along with Pompeo was often the public face of the Trump administration's imposition of crippling sanctions against Iran, was granted the special protection by Blinken for the same reason as Pompeo immediately after he left government service. That has also been repeatedly renewed in 60-day increments.

The latest 60-day extensions will expire soon and the State Department, in conjunction with the Director of National Intelligence, must determine by Wednesday if the protection should be extended again, according to the report.

The report was prepared because the special protection budget will run out in June and require a new infusion of money if extensions are deemed necessary.

Current U.S. officials say the threats have been discussed in the nuclear talks in Vienna.

Painful news reveals bond between US sailor, mentor

BY ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — "Only when it is dark enough can you see the stars."

Martin Luther King Jr. said those words on April 3, 1968, a day before he was assassinated in Memphis, Tenn. They continue to inspire Petty Officer 2nd Class Danny Smith, a 28-year-old man assigned to Submarine Group 8.

Amid uncertainty about his future and grief over his father's death, which deprived him of the opportunity to fix their strained relationship, Smith found hope from a fellow sailor who shared an unknown bond.

A little more than a year after arriving at Naval Support Activity Naples in January 2019, Smith developed a casual, professional relationship with Cmdr. Hasan Abdul-Mutakallim, who worked in a separate command but in the same building and on the same floor as Smith.

Abdul-Mutakallim, 48, seemed like a "role model and someone you could look up to," Smith said. He was easy to talk to and good at listening, Smith recalled.

"Even though I was just a random person asking him for advice and things of that nature, he was really just helpful in giving me instruction and guidance," said Smith, who was having doubts about staying in the Navy as a submariner and wanted to apply to

be a commissioned officer.

Smith grew up without his father, Raymond, for much of his childhood. As a senior in high school, Smith reconnected with his dad, but the relationship later grew distant.

Not long after visiting his father, who had suffered a stroke, Smith returned to Naples in May 2021, when his brother Carl called with the news that their father was dead.

At the same time, Abdul-Mutakallim learned of the death of "Uncle Ray" from his grandfather. He talked about it with his cousin Carl Smith, a senior chief culinary specialist and submariner in Washington state.

It was during that call that Abdul-Mutakallim learned not only that Carl Smith had a brother but also that the brother was in the Navy and working at NSA Naples.

"I'm like, 'You have a brother? I think I've spoken to him,'" Abdul-Mutakallim recalled. "Sure enough, it was (Danny Smith) and we were related."

Since then, the two have built a friendship, met each other's wives and attended family events, including a baby shower for Abdul-Mutakallim's wife.

This week, Smith leaves NSA Naples for an assignment in Maryland. In May, Abdul-Mutakallim also will leave for an assignment at another base, serendipitously in Maryland.

Iran claims barrage of missiles that hit near US consulate in Iraq

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iran claimed responsibility Sunday for a missile barrage that struck near a sprawling U.S. consulate complex in northern Iraq, saying it was retaliation for an Israeli strike in Syria that killed two members of its Revolutionary Guard earlier this week.

No injuries were reported in Sunday's attack on the city of Irbil, which marked a significant escalation between the U.S. and Iran. Hostility between the longtime foes has often played out in Iraq, whose government is allied with both countries.

The attack drew harsh condemnation from the Iraqi government, which called it a

"violation of international law and norms" and demanded an explanation from the Iranian leadership.

The United States said the missile strike emanated from Iran and strongly condemned it.

"The strikes were an outrageous violation of Iraq's sovereignty. No U.S. facilities were damaged or personnel injured, and we have no indications the attack was directed at the United States," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters in Washington.

Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard said on its website that it attacked what it described as an Israeli spy center in Irbil.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Dentist convicted of breaking teeth in scheme

WI MILWAUKEE — A Grafton dentist has been convicted of health care fraud for breaking patients' teeth and then claiming they needed crowns in an insurance scam.

U.S. Attorney Richard Frohling announced that a federal grand jury convicted Scott Charmoli, 61, of five counts of health care fraud and two counts of making false statements related to health care matters.

According to Frohling's office, starting in 2015 Charmoli started selling patients on the need for crown procedures. He then broke their teeth with a drill and took pictures of the damage he caused.

Evidence showed that he performed more than 700 crown procedures annually between 2015 and 2019 and billed more than \$4.2 million for the work between 2016 and 2019.

Stolen yacht hits boats in chase across harbor

CA NEWPORT BEACH — A man who stole a 60-foot yacht was arrested after a 10-minute chase that ended with him hitting two other boats and a seawall in Newport Beach harbor, police said.

A report of someone vandalizing a yacht led police to the Pacific Coast Highway but when officers arrived they said the suspect jumped into the boat and took off, authorities said.

After hitting the sailboat, the boat backed up, circled and, pursued by the Orange County Sheriff's Department Harbor Patrol, continued through the harbor until it hit another

parked vessel then slammed into a wall beside a bridge.

Joel Siam, 38, of San Diego, was arrested on suspicion of grand theft of a boat and possession of a stolen boat, authorities said.

Woman accused of killing boyfriend in rundown

AL MOBILE — A Florida woman making a cross-country drive with her boyfriend allegedly let him out on Interstate 10 and then intentionally ran him down, killing him, authorities said.

Johana Suarez, 37, of Miami, was jailed on a charge of murder in the death of Henry Hernandez, 48. The man was found dead alongside I-10 west of Mobile, Ala.

Capt. Paul Burch of the Mobile County Sheriff's Office told WALA-TV that the two were headed in the wrong direction, resulting in an argument that ended with Hernandez getting out of the vehicle with his belongings just miles into Alabama.

"She drove away. She didn't get too far away, turned around began traveling westbound in the eastbound lanes of I-10 and struck him at a high rate of speed pretty much killing him instantly," Burch said.

Ex-cop gets prison for trading actions for sex

PA HARRISBURG — A former Pennsylvania police detective who served on a drug task force was sentenced to more than six years in prison for having traded official actions for sexual favors.

Former Carlisle police officer Christopher Collare, 54, of Blythewood, S.C., was sen-

tenced to 75 months on charges of bribery, drug distribution and making false statements, according to the Department of Justice.

In 2015, Collare agreed to skip a hearing that resulted in dismissal of drug charges against the boyfriend of someone with whom he had sex, according to an indictment.

In 2018, Collare agreed to trade sexual favors for taking steps to help reduce a potential sentence, federal prosecutors said.

Follow-home bandits attack Lamborghini driver

CA LOS ANGELES — A man who had just parked his Lamborghini outside his downtown Los Angeles apartment building was pistol-whipped in an attempted robbery by follow-home bandits, police said.

A police statement said the victim and a friend went to an upscale restaurant in the Hollywood area. The victim noticed that a white sedan was following him.

The victim turned into an alley and parked in front of the rear entrance of the building, observing that the sedan also turned into the alley.

One robber pointed a handgun at the victim and demanded his watch, police said. A struggle ensued and the victim was pistol-whipped before the assailants ran to their cars and fled.

Forestry worker charged for suspicious fires

SC MONCKS CORNER — An employee with the South Carolina Forestry Commission, which fights wildfires, has been charged in a

string of suspicious fires earlier this year, the agency said.

Brad Chance, 52, was arrested on three counts of willfully burning someone else's land following wildfires that happened in January and February in Berkeley County near the Francis Marion National Forest, the commission said in a statement.

Chance, who worked as a forestry technician in Berkeley and Charleston counties, was suspended without pay.

University gets collection from lawyer of 'Roe' case

TX DENTON — Papers, pictures and other artifacts belonging to Sarah Weddington, a Texas lawyer who at age 26 successfully argued the landmark abortion rights case Roe v. Wade before the U.S. Supreme Court, will become part of Texas Woman's University's permanent collection.

The university in Denton said that before Weddington died at 76 in December, she donated her papers to TWU's Jane Nelson Institute for Women's Leadership.

"This collection provides a trove of interesting artifacts that will give researchers a veritable front-row seat to historical events affecting women's issues," said Mary Anne Alhadeff, the institute's executive director and chief officer.

A couple of years after graduating from law school at the University of Texas at Austin, Weddington and a former classmate, Linda Coffee, brought a lawsuit challenging a state law that largely banned abortions. Roe v. Wade eventually advanced to the U.S. Supreme Court.

— From wire reports

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Hokies stun Duke for first ACC title

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For the second straight Saturday night, Duke failed to deliver Coach K a send-off victory.

This time it was Virginia Tech playing party pooper.

Hunter Cattoor scored a career-high 31 points and the seventh-seeded Hokies won the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament for the first time, beating the Blue Devils 82-67 to deny Mike Krzyzewski a league title in his final season.

Virginia Tech (23-12) came to Brooklyn in need of a run to make the NCAA Tournament, and then was staring at elimination Wednesday night when Darius Maddox hit a go-ahead three-pointer at the buzzer to beat Clemson in overtime.

Coach Mike Young said the Hokies were “luckier than hell” after that game.

After beating Duke how did it feel?

“Gratifying,” Young said.

Virginia Tech became only the second ACC team to take the crown with four wins in four days (Duke, 2017) and became the lowest seed to win the most storied conference tournament in college basketball.

They’re also the fourth ACC champion to win the title by beating the top three seeds.

The Blue Devils lost Coach K’s final game at Cameron Indoor Stadium to rival North Carolina on March 5, derailing what the school hoped would be a celebration of the winningest coach in Division I men’s college basketball.

Top-seeded and seventh-ranked Duke (28-6) got another chance for a feel-good victory and to add at least one more trophy to the case for the retiring Hall of Famer. Again it was not to be.

“I tell them all the time: ‘Don’t worry about me,’ ” Krzyzewski said. “Even in a moment of defeat I want to be there with them. How do we use it? How do we get better?”

Krzyzewski has been trying his best to shield his team from all the attention given his last go-round.

“Last weekend the whole world was talking about it. So it was a very difficult weekend,” he said. “What we’ve tried to do is eliminate everything. These are young guys. I’ve loved coaching them. I think we can be good in the (NCAA) Tournament. I

was really positive with them afterwards.”

When Justyn Mutts made a two-handed slam over Blue Devils star freshman Paolo Banchero with 2:26 left in the second half, the Hokies led 76-64 and their outnumbered fans rose with roar.

Virginia Tech’s first ACC championship since joining the conference in 2004 was sealed.

Soon after Metallica’s “Enter Sandman,” the Hokies’ unofficial fight song, blared throughout Barclays Center and the Virginia Tech fans sang along like it was the fourth quarter at Lane Stadium in Blacksburg, Va.

Banchero scored 20 points for Duke, which shot 4-for-20 from three-point range and allowed the Hokies to make 50% of their shots.

Virginia Tech’s last — and only — conference tournament title came in 1979 when the Hokies were in the Metro Conference.

Young led Wofford to five Southern Conference Tournament titles in 17 seasons.

It only took him three seasons to get his first with Virginia Tech and he did it with a roster full of guys he recruited to play at his old school.

No. 2 Arizona gets past No. 13 UCLA to win title

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Arizona clanged shots, threw weak passes, watched UCLA build what seemed to be an insurmountable lead. Then the Wildcats found a gear few teams have — maybe no other team has.

Now they’re Pac-12 champions, a likely No. 1 seed on Selection Sunday and among the favorites to win the national championship.

Not bad for a team playing its first season under a new coach.

Benedict Mathurin scored 27 points and No. 2 Arizona used a massive second-half run to beat No. 13 UCLA 84-76 on Saturday night, winning the Pac-12 Tournament in coach Tommy Lloyd’s first season.

“These games are long and we’re a team that makes runs,”

Lloyd said. “I’m always like, ‘Hang in there, hang in there, we could be a possession or two away from a run.’ We did a good job of hanging in there.”

The Wildcats and Bruins put on a Vegas headlining show worthy of the conference’s top two seeds, trading athletic plays and big runs at the first full-capacity Pac-12 Tournament in three years.

Top-seeded Arizona (31-4) played its second consecutive game without point guard Kerr Kriisa due to a sprained right ankle suffered in the quarterfinals against Stanford. His replacement, Justin Kier, was limited to 13 minutes due to foul trouble, depleting the Wildcats’ depth even more.

Arizona swept the Pac-12 regular-season and tournament titles for the seventh time.

No. 6 Kansas tops No. 14 Texas Tech to take Big 12

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Ochai Agbaji was a lightly regarded three-star prospect when he left his home in Kansas City, Mo., four years ago to play just down the road at Kansas.

Agbaji returned home this weekend as the Big 12’s player of the year and, in front of hundreds of friends and family at the Big 12 Tournament, led the sixth-ranked Jayhawks to a 74-65 victory over Texas Tech on Saturday night to capture not only the title for his team but MVP honors for himself.

“I’m just blessed to be in this position, but I give it back to my teammates,” said Agbaji, the fifth player to win the regular-season player of the year award and the Big 12 Tournament’s top honor. “I couldn’t have done it without them.”

And Kansas couldn’t have done it without him.

Agbaji scored 16 points, including a couple of clinching foul shots with just over a minute left, to lift the Jayhawks (27-6) past the plucky Red Raiders (25-9) and likely secure a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

David McCormack added 18 points and 11 rebounds, Christian Braun had 14 points and Jalen Wilson and Remy Martin scored 12 apiece for the Jayhawks, who showed the poise and resilience of veteran players in the final minutes as Texas Tech fumbled away its own chance at the title.

The Red Raiders trailed 63-58 with about four minutes to go when Terrence Shannon Jr. was called for charging. Kevin Obanor turned it over on the next Tech possession.

Villanova tops Creighton for Big East title

Associated Press

NEW YORK — While Collin Gillespie waited to twirl the souvenir net from atop a ladder he could not have climbed a year ago, he was spotted by another former Villanova star who knows how to win a championship game in crunch time.

Kris Jenkins joked maybe it was his and Gillespie's shared uniform No. 2 that made the team so fearless when the outcome was at stake. Or maybe it's just the Wildcat way forged under coach Jay Wright of shaking off nerves, bad shots, a stifling defense, whatever distraction got in their way, to always hit that next big shot and win the next big game.

"I mean, that's what we expect," Jenkins said.

Gillespie missed the Big East Tournament a season ago, then won it for Villanova this year.

Gillespie nailed consecutive late three-

pointers that put No. 8 Villanova ahead for good, and the Wildcats beat Creighton 54-48 to take the Big East Tournament championship Saturday night at Madison Square Garden.

"This is why I came back," he said as he held his tournament Most Outstanding Player trophy.

Gillespie missed both postseason tournaments in 2021 with a torn ligament in his left knee. But a year later he was courageous in the waning minutes, hitting the go-ahead three over the outstretched arm of 7-foot-1 center Ryan Kalkbrenner with 2:44 left.

The 6-foot-3 senior then grabbed a rebound at the other end and came right back and drained another jumper over Kalkbrenner, the Big East defensive player of the year, for a 50-45 lead — sending Villanova on its way to yet another championship under Wright.

"I'm still kind of surprised when he makes those plays," Wright said. "It's incredible. But we put it in his hands to make those plays."

The Wildcats won the Big East Tournament under Wright in 2015, and then three straight from 2017-19. The school also captured national championships in 2016 and 2018 under Wright.

Justin Moore and the rest of Villanova's starters circled Gillespie and fired him up before he went to the free-throw line in the final seconds. The two-time conference player of the year hit both and was soon mobbed by teammates at midcourt to kick off the championship party.

Then they watched Gillespie take his turn with the scissors cutting down the net.

"He's just playing with absolutely no fear because he knows he's put the work in," Wright said.

Broncos slip past Aztecs for MWC title, NCAA bid

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Boise State works on the "perfect possession" every practice, where they have to get one stop and grab a rebound.

"We've done it so many times in practice," freshman Tyson Degenhart said, "that we just knew what to do when it came time to do it."

San Diego State had the ball with 28 seconds left Saturday, but Matt Bradley and Trey Pulliam both missed shots before Boise State's Emmanuel Akot grabbed the rebound as time wound down — and the Broncos defeated the Aztecs 53-52 to win the Mountain West Tournament and earn the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Montana State 87, Northern Colorado 66: Xavier Bishop scored 19 points to help the Bobcats advance to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 26 years as they routed the Bears in the Big Sky Conference tournament championship in Boise, Idaho.

Top-seeded Montana State

(27-7) collected its third Big Sky Conference tournament championship and advanced to its fourth NCAA Tournament (1951, 1986, 1996).

CSU Fullerton 72, Long Beach State 71: E.J. Anosike had 22 points and eight rebounds, Damari Milstead hit five three-pointers and finished with 17 points and the Titans rallied from a 14-point deficit to win the Big West Conference tournament in Henderson, Nev.

CSU Fullerton, which has won four games in a row, clinched a berth into the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2018.

Akron 75, Kent State 55: Enrique Freeman scored 23 points and the Zips shut down Mid-American Conference player of the year Sincere Carry while defeating their bitter rival in the MAC championship in Cleveland to earn their first NCAA bid since 2013.

Fourth-seeded Akron (24-9), which upset top-seeded Toledo in the semifinals, also ended the Golden Flashes' 14-game winning streak on a day that began

with four Kent State players being disciplined for a profane video.

UAB 82, Louisiana Tech 73: Jordan "Jelly" Walker made 11 of 11 from the free-throw line and finished with 27 points to help the Blazers win the championship game of the Conference USA tournament in Frisco, Texas, to clinch a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Vermont 82, UMBC 43: Ryan Davis scored 20 points, Ben Shungu added 19 and the Catamounts won the America East championship in Burlington, Vt., for an automatic NCAA tournament berth.

Texas A&M-Corpus Christi 73, Southeastern Louisiana 65: Terrion Murdix and Jalen Jackson each had 13 points and five assists, and the Islanders advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in 15 years with a win in the Southland Conference championship in Katy, Texas.

New Mexico State 66, Abilene Christian 52: Clayton Henry had 15 points and eight rebounds to help the Aggies win in

the championship game of the Western Athletic Conference tournament in Las Vegas to earn an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Saint Peter's 60, Monmouth 54: Doug Edert scored 20 points off the bench, including a key three-pointer in the final minute, and the Peacocks won the MAAC Championship in Atlantic City, N.J., and an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Norfolk State 72, Coppin State 57: Conference player of the year Joe Bryant Jr. scored 23 points and the top-seeded Spartans used a closing flourish to win the Mid-East Athletic Conference tournament championship in Norfolk, Va., and a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Texas Southern 87, Alcorn State 62: John Walker III scored 12 of his 17 points in the second half and the second-seeded Tigers pulled away in the championship of the Southwestern Athletic Conference tournament in Birmingham, Ala., earning an automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Thompson scores 38 to lead Warriors

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Klay Thompson has been waiting for his shot to start falling consistently, and he certainly found a groove for Golden State against defending champion Milwaukee.

He didn't force it, and plans to build on this as he keeps learning during his comeback season. Grinning, he said he wanted to score 40 points, it just sounds better, but 38 was great.

Thompson's total was a season best and he raised his right arm in triumph to ignite the home crowd while leading the Warriors past the Bucks, 122-109 on Saturday night.

"I was eager for a night like this," Thompson said, "but a mid-season shooting slump, it's not going to kill my ego, I'm still going to go out there and compete."

Thompson shot 15 for 24 with eight three-pointers and had his second 30-point performance since returning Jan. 9 from a 2½-year absence following knee and Achilles surgeries.

"I'm sure it's a relief," coach Steve Kerr said. "He's so hard on himself and wants so badly to succeed."

Milwaukee native Jordan Poole returned to Golden State's starting lineup and scored 30 points with five three-pointers to go with six rebounds and five assists.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 31 points and eight rebounds, but the Warriors' defense held the rest of the Bucks down. Milwaukee had won six a row.

Jazz 134, Kings 125: Jordan Clarkson scored a career-high 45 points to overcome the absence of Rudy Gobert and Mike Conley and helped host Utah beat Sacramento.

Clarkson set a franchise record for points as a reserve with the first 40-point game for the Jazz since he had 41 last season on May 10 against Golden State. He has four games with more than 40 points off the bench.

Three games after posting a career-best 44 points, De'Aaron Fox had 41 points and 11 assists for Sacramento.

Timberwolves 113, Heat 104: Jaylen Nowell scored 16 points, Karl-Anthony Towns and Anthony Edwards each added 15 and visiting Minnesota beat Miami.

The Timberwolves have won seven of eight

games.

Raptors 125, Nuggets 115: Pascal Siakam scored 33 points, Scottie Barnes had 25 and visiting Toronto pulled away late to beat Denver.

Chris Boucher added 21 points and 13 rebounds for the Raptors, who won their third in a row and improved to 5-5 since the All-Star break.

Bulls 101, Cavaliers 91: DeMar DeRozan scored 25 points, Nikola Vucevic added 20 points and 14 rebounds and host Chicago beat Cleveland.

Ayo Dosunmu made three three-pointers and finished with 17 points for the Bulls, who came away with their second straight win after losing five in a row.

Pacers 119, Spurs 108: Tyrese Haliburton had 19 points and 10 assists and visiting Indiana beat San Antonio to snap a three-game skid.

Trail Blazers 127, Wizards 118: Josh Hart scored a career-high 44 points and host Portland beat Washington to snap a six-game losing streak.

Martinook breaks late tie, Hurricanes beat Flyers

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Jordan Martinook broke a tie with 3:50 remaining, his first goal in 17 games, and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Philadelphia Flyers 3-1 on Saturday.

Martinook scored on a redirection of Vincent Trocheck's shot as a long shift was winding down.

Frederik Andersen made 28 saves in his first game since March 3 after dealing with an undisclosed ailment, and Steven Lorentz and Sebastian Aho added goals for Carolina. The Hurricanes have at least a point in 13 straight home games, the second-longest stretch in franchise history.

Derick Brassard scored his 200th NHL goal in the second period for Philadelphia. The Flyers have a 11-game (0-9-2) road losing streak. Martin Jones stopped 33 shots.

Blues 7, Predators 4: Robert Thomas scored his second goal

with 2:38 left and St. Louis won at Nashville for its second straight victory.

Thomas also had an assist, David Perron had two goals, including an empty-netter with 1:57 left, and Justin Faulk added a second empty-net goal 24 seconds later. Brandon Saad and Torey Krug each had a goal and an assist.

Bruins 3, Coyotes 2: Charlie Coyle scored with 3:21 left in the third period and host Boston won for the ninth time in 11 games.

The Bruins won their 18th straight against Arizona, with the last loss coming on Oct. 9, 2010. The loss snapped the Coyotes' season-high, four-game winning streak.

Devils 2, Ducks 1 (SO): Tomas Tatar and Jesper Bratt scored in a shootout and Nico Daws stopped both Anaheim attempts to lead host New Jersey.

Tatar also scored in regulation and Daws had 33 saves as

the Devils won three of four games on their homestand.

Blackhawks 6, Senators 3: Jonathan Toews and Caleb Jones each scored twice and Chicago rallied to win at Ottawa.

Down 2-0 after the first period, the Blackhawks scored four times in the second to take a 4-3 lead.

Flames 3, Red Wings 0: Elias Lindholm scored his career-high 30th goal and Jacob Markstrom made 19 saves for his league-leading ninth shutout to win at Calgary.

Tyler Toffoli and Blake Coleman also scored for the Flames, who are 16-2-1 in their last 19.

Kraken 4, Canadiens 3 (SO): Marcus Johansson scored in the seventh round of the shootout to lift Seattle to a win at Montreal.

Johansson also had two assists, and Yanni Gourde, Ryan Donato and Jared McCann had goals in regulation for the Kraken. Philipp Grubauer made 30 saves and stopped all seven

shots he faced in the shootout.

Rangers 7, Stars 4: Artemi Panarin had a goal and two of his three assists during New York's four-goal first period and New York won at Dallas.

Greg McKegg, Adam Fox, Mika Zibanejad, Patrik Nemeth, Barclay Goodrow and Ryan Strome also scored for the Rangers, who have won four of six. K'Andre Miller and Dryden each had two assists and Igor Shesterkin stopped 30 shots.

Sharks 5, Kings 0: Tomas Hertl scored two goals, Timo Meier had a goal and two assists and host San Jose beat Los Angeles again.

Oilers 4, Lightning 1: Connor McDavid scored twice and Mikko Koskinen stopped 30 shots as host Edmonton beat Tampa Bay.

Leon Draisaitl and Kailer Yamamoto each had a goal and an assist for the Oilers, who have won two in a row and moved into third place in the Pacific Division.