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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Ukraine now seen as war of attrition

Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian authorities said Sunday that Russia's military bombed an art school sheltering about 400 people in the port city of Mariupol, where refugees described how "battles took place over every street," weeks into a devastating siege.

The fall of Mariupol would allow Russian forces in southern and eastern Ukraine to link up. But Western military analysts say that even if the surrounded city is taken, the troops battling for control there a block at a time may be too depleted to help secure Russian breakthroughs on other fronts.

Three weeks into the invasion, Western governments and analysts see the conflict shifting to a war of attrition, with bogged down Russian forces launching long-range missiles at cities and military bases as Ukrainian forces carry out hit-and-run attacks and seek to sever their supply lines.

Ukrainians "have not greeted Russian soldiers with a bunch of flowers," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told CNN, but with "weapons in their hand."

Moscow cannot hope to rule the country,

he added, given Ukrainians' enmity toward the Russian forces.

The strike on the art school was the second time in less than a week that officials reported an attack on a public building where Mariupol residents had taken shelter. On Wednesday, a bomb hit a theater where more than 1,000 people were believed to be sheltering.

There was no immediate word on casualties at the school, which The Associated Press could not independently verify. Ukrainian officials have not given an update on the search of the theater since Friday, when they said at least 130 people had been rescued and another 1,300 were trapped by rubble.

City officials and aid groups say food, water and electricity have run low in Mariupol and fighting has kept out humanitarian convoys. Communications are severed.

Unexpectedly strong Ukrainian resistance has dashed Russian President Vladimir Putin's hopes for a quick victory after he ordered the Feb. 24 invasion of his neighbor. In recent days, Russian forces

have entered Mariupol, cutting it off from the sea and devastating a massive steel plant. But taking the city could prove costly.

"The block-by-block fighting in Mariupol itself is costing the Russian military time, initiative, and combat power," the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said in a briefing.

In a blunt assessment, the think tank concluded that Russia failed in its initial campaign to take the capital of Kyiv and other major cities quickly, and its stalled invasion is creating conditions for a "very violent and bloody" stalemate.

Russia would need 800,000 troops — almost its entire active-duty military — to control Ukraine for a prolonged period, according to Michael Clarke, former head of the British-based Royal United Services Institute, a defense think tank.

"Unless the Russians intend to be completely genocidal — they could flatten all the major cities, and Ukrainians will rise up against Russian occupation — there will be just constant guerrilla war," Clarke said.

Ukraine war backdrop for US hypersonic weapons push

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Lagging behind Russia in developing hypersonic weapons, the U.S. Navy is rushing to field its first, with installation on a warship starting as soon as late next year.

The United States is in a race with Russia and China to develop these weapons, which travel at speeds akin to ballistic missiles but are difficult to shoot down because of their maneuverability.

The Russian military says it already deployed hypersonic missiles, claiming on both Saturday and Sunday to have deployed them against targets in Ukraine marking the weapon's

first use in combat. The Pentagon couldn't confirm a hypersonic weapon was used in the attacks.

The American military is accelerating development to catch up.

The U.S. weapon would launch like a ballistic missile and would release a hypersonic glide vehicle that would reach speeds seven to eight times faster than the speed of sound before hitting the target.

In Maine, General Dynamics subsidiary Bath Iron Works has begun engineering and design work on changes necessary to install the weapon system on three Zumwalt-class destroyers.

The work would begin at a yet-to-be-named shipyard sometime in fiscal year that begins in October 2023, the Navy said.

Hypersonic weapons are defined as anything traveling beyond Mach 5, or five times faster than the speed of sound. That's about 3,800 mph. Intercontinental ballistic missiles far exceed that threshold but travel in a predictable path, making it possible to intercept them.

The new weapons are maneuverable.

Existing missile defense systems, including the Navy's Aegis system, would have trouble intercepting such objects because maneuverability makes

their movement unpredictable and speed leaves little time to react.

Russia says it has ballistic missiles that can deploy hypersonic glide vehicles as well as a hypersonic cruise missile.

The U.S. is "straining just to catch up" because it failed to invest in the new technology, with only a fraction of the 10,000 people who were working on the program in the 1980s, said U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper, a Tennessee Democrat who's chair of a subcommittee that monitors the program.

"If we want to pursue parity, we will need to back this effort with more money, time, and talent than we are now," he said.

Exit from Afghanistan raises new anti-terrorism challenges

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers on Thursday pressed Pentagon officials on the impact of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, raising doubts over efforts to combat terrorism from afar and whether the United States is compensating civilian casualties of the 20-year war.

Reps. Rob Wittman, R-Va., and Michael Waltz, R-Fla., said they worried the exit of U.S. troops more than six months ago has hampered counterterrorism operations in the region and created a “breeding ground” for the resurgence of groups such as the Islamic State.

“I fear that we no longer have a good handle on where the terrorists are or what they’re doing,” Wittman said.

Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East, confirmed those concerns in testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, acknowledging the difficulties of combating terrorism from outside Afghanistan.

“I regret that we no longer have the ability to be as effective as we would like to be on the ground,” said McKenzie, who leads U.S. Central Command. “The counterterrorism mission — we’re doing that

over the horizon and as I’ve said, it’s much harder to do that over the horizon.”

The post-withdrawal “over the horizon” strategy depends on uncovering and neutralizing threats through aerial surveillance and drones launched from outside the country rather than with troops on the ground.

The U.S. has not launched any strikes in Afghanistan since the last American troops departed its capital of Kabul in August, McKenzie said. But he characterized the February raid that killed an Islamic State leader in Syria as an example of the strategy working successfully. Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi blew himself up after the U.S. used an intelligence tip to locate al-Qurayshi’s home and sent in U.S. commandos to capture or kill him.

Conducting such operations in Afghanistan remains “difficult but not impossible,” McKenzie said. The U.S. lost significant intelligence capabilities by exiting the country and is now increasingly reliant on its relationship with neighboring Pakistan for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions, he said. Pakistan is friendly with the ruling Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Faulty landing gear springs led to bomber crash

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

Worn springs in the landing gear caused a B-2 Spirit bomber to crash on the runway last year at Missouri’s Whiteman Air Force Base, according to a recently released investigation report.

The B-2, assigned to the 393rd Bomb Squadron of the 509th Bomb Wing and known as the Spirit of Georgia, was significantly damaged in the Sept. 14 crash. The two pilots escaped unscathed.

Preliminary estimates put the cost of repairing the B-2 at a minimum of \$10.1 million, though the final cost is still to be determined, according to the Air Force Global Strike Command report, which was released Thursday.

The Air Force has said the bombers cost approximately \$2 billion apiece, making the B-2 Spirit one of the most expensive aircraft in the world.

The landing gear’s lock link springs didn’t maintain enough pressure to prevent the jet’s left main landing gear from folding in on itself as the plane touched down, the report said.

This spring failure and resulting landing gear collapse was the lead cause of the accident, Air Force Col. Robert Cocke, the investigation board president, wrote in the conclusion of the report, dated Jan. 12.

Army holds first ‘home-station’ training in Alaska

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Roughly 8,000 soldiers are training in sub-zero temperatures in Alaska in what the Army said is major progress in implementing its year-old Arctic strategy.

“Regaining Arctic Dominance,” a report issued by the Army in March last year, laid out how the service planned to train, organize and equip cold-weather forces so they could successfully partner with Arctic allies and maintain regional stability — all with a watchful eye on Russia.

The Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center exercise, which kicked off March 9 and runs through Thursday, is the first in which the Army employs its

newly conceived “home-station” combat training center to Alaska.

In this case it is being used to evaluate the combat capabilities of the Fort Wainwright-based 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team during battle scenarios at the Donnelly and Yukon training areas in south-central Alaska.

This is only the second time the Army has used the home-station concept after its initial trial in Hawaii last year.

This month’s training took the Arctic strategy and “put it into action,” Gen. Charles Flynn, commander of U.S. Army Pacific, told reporters during a conference call Wednesday from Wainwright.

“The implementation plan of that strate-

gy is what’s being manifested today here in Alaska with a combat training center rotation in Alaska using the unique and extraordinary capabilities that are up here in the Yukon and Donnelly training areas in Alaska,” said Flynn, who was joined by Gen. Michael Garrett, head of U.S. Army Forces Command.

“These forces stationed up here are uniquely positioned to learn how to live and operate in this environment so that we can learn how to fight in these kinds of conditions and in this environment,” Flynn said.

From an Army readiness perspective, a home-station rotation is a good-sense idea that is overdue, Garrett said.

Gas over \$5 a gallon at US bases in Pacific

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — A gallon of premium gas rose above \$5 on Saturday at U.S. military bases in Japan, South Korea and Guam, according to the Army and Air Force Exchange Service.

At the two AAFES stations at Yokota, the U.S. airlift hub in western Tokyo, premium costs \$5.09, or 24 cents more per gallon, according to an AAFES gas price update on Thursday. Diesel is \$5.31 a gallon, up from \$4.91.

The same hike applies at other U.S. bases throughout Japan, including Camp Zama southwest of Tokyo, the headquarters of U.S. Army Japan, Misawa Air

Base in northeastern Japan and installations on Okinawa, according to AAFES.

Premium at U.S. bases in South Korea rose even higher, to \$5.11 per gallon, with regular going to \$4.38, hikes of 24 cents and 21 cents, respectively, according to the AAFES price guide. Guam drivers now pay \$5.10 for premium and \$4.38 for regular.

A spokeswoman for Navy Exchange Service Command, Courtney Williams, told Stars and Stripes in an email Friday that she was seeking information about NEX fuel prices.

At Yokota, Air Force Staff Sgt. Kaylee Allen, 24, topped off her Toyota Ractis on Friday, ahead of the price hike. She blamed

the rise in the cost of gas on Russian President Vladimir Putin's now three-week-old invasion of Ukraine.

"If this is what it has to be, then I'm going to pay the gas prices until I have to ride a bike," she said. "I'm going to do what I need to get to work."

In the United States, consumers passed the \$5 mark ahead of service members and their families overseas, according to AAFES. Drivers stateside paid an average \$5.04 for premium and \$4.31 for regular as of March 14.

Gasoline prices at U.S. bases in Japan have about doubled in two years. In March 2020, just as the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus

pandemic, a gallon of regular cost about \$2.30.

"It's ridiculous," said civilian aircraft maintainer Christopher Bash, 54, as he gassed up at Yokota on Friday morning.

Service members deserve relief at the pump, he said.

"They sacrifice a lot and most of them overseas have a car because they want to learn about the country they are in," Bash said. "They shouldn't be gouged out for gas."

Air Force spouse Miquisha Dauenbaugh, 27, filling up her Nissan Cube at Yokota, wasn't too concerned about the high prices.

"I hear a lot of people talking about it," she said. "I don't drive very much."

S. Korea relaxes virus rules; cases still at record levels

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korea decided Friday to loosen restrictions on private gatherings, despite reporting a record high of 621,328 new COVID-19 cases and 429 deaths the previous day.

The Health and Welfare Ministry raised the limit on private gatherings from six to eight people effective Monday, but extended the existing 11 p.m. curfew on businesses until April 3.

One of South Korea's leading experts on COVID-19 said he "couldn't understand" the government's policy changes amid a record-breaking case count.

"As an infectious disease expert, it is an insane action because already a lot of patients are in the intensive-care unit at the hospital and there are many deaths," Dr. Kim Woo

Joo, a professor of infectious diseases at Korea University Guro Hospital, told Stars and Stripes by phone on Friday. "The hospitals are already strained, and health care workers are infected."

Many of his colleagues share his concern, Kim said. He said political considerations, such as protests from business owners, could have played a role in changing group limits.

"It could aggravate the situation more by increasing the number of laboratory-confirmed cases every day," Kim said.

Health and Welfare Minister Kwon Deok Cheol at a meeting Friday seemed to acknowledge the risk to public health, but said the decision to ease gathering limits was overdue.

"It is high time that we should newly adjust our social distancing for the last two weeks," Kwon said at the Central Disaster and Safety

Countermeasure Headquarters. "But it is a situation of great public concern about significant relaxation of social distancing, considering uncertainties in predicting the peak of the pandemic, a huge epidemic of the omicron variant and burdens on our medical response system."

Health and government officials had "heated discussions" prior to Friday's policy change and ultimately decided to "slightly adjust" gathering limits "in consideration of everyday inconveniences ... and the ease of the suffering of the self-employed and small business owners."

South Korea counted 621,328 cases Thursday, according to the daily COVID-19 update by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency. The KDCA also reported 429 deaths, another one-day record that brought the nation's pandemic death toll to 11,481.

Drunken driver seeks Donald Trump at USAF England base

Stars and Stripes

RAF MILDENHALL, England — A local man who showed up at RAF Mildenhall looking for former President Donald Trump faces drunken driving charges, English law enforcement authorities said Friday.

Kevin Mole, 36, of Crow Hall Estate, Downham Market, was released on bail after being arrested outside the base earlier in the week, Suffolk police told Stars and Stripes.

Mole showed up at the base gate at 6:30 a.m. Monday and

attempted to gain access to meet Trump, a U.S. Air Force 100th Refueling Wing statement said Friday.

Airmen with the 100th Security Forces Squadron and U.K. Defense Ministry police safely arrested him and transferred him to local authorities, the

wing statement said.

Trump did arrive at Mildenhall during a 2019 Air Force One refueling stop, but he wasn't there last week.

Mildenhall police summed up the incident with "#Wrong-Country" on their Twitter account.

How US, allies untied to punish, sanction Putin

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Just days before Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, President Joe Biden quietly dispatched a team to European Union headquarters in Belgium.

These were not spy chiefs or generals, but experts in reading fine print and tracking the flow of money, computer chips and other goods around the world. Their mandate: inflict maximum pain on Russian President Vladimir Putin, making it harder, if not impossible, for him to fund a prolonged war in Ukraine and denying him access to technologies at the core of modern warfare.

There were intense meetings in February in Brussels, Paris, London and Berlin, often running six hours at a time as the allies tried to craft the details of a historic economic blockade, according to Biden administration officials. Some of the exports the United States wanted to ban were met with reluctance by the Europeans, who would essentially be telling their own companies to forgo several billion dollars in annual revenues from Russia.

When there was a deadlock, U.S. negotiators would put Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo on the phone.

“You can say ‘no’ now, but when the body bags are coming out of Ukraine, you’re not going to want to be a holdout,” Raimondo said she told allied counterparts. “Do the right thing.”

Everyone signed on — and before the invasion.

Raimondo said what ultimately drove the agreement and the fast timeline was the threat of Putin’s imminent attack on Ukraine.

The wealthiest nations in the world — outside of China — are directly confronting Putin on their preferred terms. They have imposed sanctions in which their strengths intersect with Russia’s vulnerabilities. Russia is reliant on the U.S., the EU, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan for cutting-edge technologies and investment, so the allies decided to cut Moscow off.

It’s a strategic play designed to trap Putin in a downward spiral, as foreign investors pull out their money in response to the atrocities. It’s also a remarkable show of unity that could be tested in the coming weeks by the allies’ own dependence on fossil fuels.

While the allied talks in the lead-up to the war were critical, the EU was not just waiting around for U.S. direction to act. Bloc members had been consulting for months.

EU Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis on Thursday praised the “very good coordination” among nations and said the sanctions “are biting hard. Russia’s financial markets are close to collapse.” He also noted that the sanctions create costs for the allies, though the price is much less than the consequences of the war spreading.

Some think the census should be reevaluated

Associated Press

Is it time to rethink the census and other surveys that measure changes in the U.S. population?

Policymakers and demographers have been asking that question since results released by the U.S. Census Bureau this month showed Black, Hispanic, American Indian and other minority residents were undercounted at greater rates in 2020 than in the previous decade.

On the top of that, results from a version of its most comprehensive survey that compares year-to-year changes in U.S. life had to be scrapped because disruptions caused by the pandemic produced fewer responses in 2020.

“The current model of coming up with a master address list, mailing everybody an invitation — like you’re inviting people to a party and hoping they respond, and if not, you’re going to track them down — I think it’s an obsolete system,” said Arturo Vargas, CEO of NALGO Educational Fund, a nonpartisan nonprofit that supports Latino political engagement.

The undercounts in the 2020 census were blamed on the pandemic, natural disasters and political interference from the Trump administration, but undercounts of racial and ethnic minorities are nothing new to the census; they’ve been persistent for decades.

In recent years, the cost of censuses and surveys have grown while public participation rates for surveys have declined. The bureau’s biggest between-census effort to take the measure of the U.S. population, the American Community Survey, produces 11 billion statistics from interviews with 3.5 million households each year, and the once-a-decade census tallies every U.S. resident for a count used in divvying up federal funding and congressional seats among the states as well as redrawing political districts.

Even before the release of the 2020 report card earlier this month, the Census Bureau had been developing new ways of gathering data. Chief among them is the embryonic Frames Program that would combine all kinds of data sets, including administrative records from the private sector and government agencies, as well as surveys and censuses that have been staples of Census Bureau data-gathering for decades.

North Korea fires artillery into sea days after missile launch

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea fired suspected artillery pieces into the sea Sunday, South Korea’s military said, days after the North’s latest missile launch ended in failure amid the country’s recent burst of weapons testing activity.

There is speculation that North Korea could soon try to launch its developmental longest-range ballistic missile to bolster its arsenal and dial up pressure on the United States to wrest concessions as negotiations remain stalled. South Korea’s military suggested North Korea’s midair missile

explosion last Wednesday involved parts of the Hwasong-17 missile, its biggest weapon.

On Sunday, South Korea’s Defense Ministry said it detected firings likely from multiple rocket launch systems off North Korea’s west coast. The ministry said the military closely monitors North Korean moves and maintains its readiness.

South Korea’s presidential office said in a separate statement it held an emergency national security council meeting to discuss what it called the North’s “short-range projectile launches.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Special copy of Marvel Comics fetches \$2.4M

NY NEW YORK — A particularly prized copy of the first Marvel comic book fetched more than \$2.4 million in an online auction, the auctioneer said.

Known as the Marvel Comics #1 “pay copy,” it’s “arguably one of the top three comic books in the world of comics collecting,” said Vincent Zurzolo, chief operating officer of ComicConnect. The New York-based auctioneer sold the book for a bit under \$2,427,800.

The buyer’s name was not disclosed.

Man charged after stealing 70-ton crane

AL CHILTON — An Alabama man who called a wrecker service asking to have a 70-ton crane pulled out of the woods is now charged with stealing the heavy machinery, sheriff’s officials said.

The owner of a towing service contacted the Chilton County Sheriff’s Office, saying the man had called claiming someone gave him the crane, and he wanted it removed so he could sell it for scrap, the agency said in a statement.

The wrecker service owner recalled moving the same crane a few years before and contacted its owner, who denied having given it away.

The man who wanted the crane moved fled before officers arrived, driving the rig into a ditch where it became stuck.

The 26-year-old Clanton man was arrested on a probation violation and first-degree theft charges.

Island library wants your banned books

ME MATINICUS ISLAND — There’s an “Island of Misfit Toys” in the popular holiday classic. Now there’s an island for unwanted and banned books, too.

The tiny library on Matinicus Island, 22 miles off the Maine coast, is on a mission to fill its shelves with books that have fallen out of favor elsewhere.

From “And Tango Makes Three,” the story of two male penguins that raised a chick together, to classics like “To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee, “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood and “The Grapes of Wrath” by John Steinbeck, all books are welcome including those that are being banned or canceled in other parts of the country.

Eavesdropping charge dismissed for school mom

MI ONAWAY — A judge dismissed an unusual felony charge against a northern Michigan woman who used her phone to record a conversation between two school officials.

Erin Chaskey, who has complained that a history teacher at Onaway High School is too liberal, said she was standing outside the superintendent’s office and recorded a conversation between two people because they were talking about her.

“They did not close the door,” Presque Isle County Judge Aaron Gauthier said in dismissing the eavesdropping charge, referring to Rod Fullerton, who was Onaway superintendent at the time, and a school board member.

Crews rescue unprepared hiker stuck on icy ledge

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Emergency personnel rescued an unprepared hiker who got trapped on an icy ledge after getting lost during a snowstorm on a trail in the Sandia Mountains overlooking Albuquerque, police said.

The hiker was not dressed for cold and windy weather and called 911 when he was forced to stand still in snow on the ledge to avoid slipping and falling off the mountain, according to a police department statement.

An officer rappelled down to the hiker and provided him with clothing and crampons, enabling the team to get him off the ledge and hike with him to a parking lot where he was treated and released by fire department medical personnel, the statement said.

Would-be robber caught after crash with police

VA MARTINSVILLE — A Virginia man fleeing an attempted bank robbery was caught after he crashed a motorcycle into a police vehicle, officials said.

Martinsville police said a 35-year-old man entered the Carter Bank and Trust in Martinsville, opened a bag and ordered the teller to put money inside, WSLs-TV reported. The man didn’t get any money and left, police said.

Officers found the man as he was taking off on a motorcycle. After a brief pursuit, police said the man was involved in a wreck with a police vehicle while off-road behind a building on Clay Street.

Driver falls asleep, kills 2 men changing tire

FL TAMPA — Two men who were changing a tire on the side of Interstate 275 in Tampa were killed when another driver fell asleep at the wheel and hit them, officials said.

A 73-year-old man had pulled over onto the road’s shoulder after a tire blew out, the Florida Highway Patrol said in a report. A 30-year-old friend of the man arrived a short time later to help him with the tire.

The two men were on the driver’s side of the car when a car driven by a 36-year-old man swerved into them, the report said. The man who hit them was not injured in the crash, the report said.

Business owner indicted for selling stolen phones

NC CHARLOTTE — A North Carolina businessman was indicted on charges of selling stolen phones and other electronic devices overseas, officials said.

A federal criminal indictment charges Rami Mahmud Mhana, 45, of Charlotte with four counts of transportation of stolen goods, according to U.S. Attorney Dena J. King.

According to the indictment, from May 2017 through October 2019, Mhana bought hundreds of fraudulently obtained phones and devices which he sold and shipped overseas to the United Arab Emirates and to Hong Kong. The indictment said Mhana knew the devices were stolen or chose to ignore that fact.

— From wire reports



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Prideful Peacocks power past Racers

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Undersized in every way, Saint Peter's became the latest NCAA Tournament darling that only the most ardent hoops fans had heard of before it stepped onto a court with a March Madness logo.

These proud Peacocks from Jersey City, N.J., became the third No. 15 seed to advance to the Sweet 16, first tossing eight-time national champion Kentucky out of the bracket and then taking care of Murray State in a workmanlike 70-60 win on Saturday night.

Even the mid-major Racers were taller and beefier than the Peacocks, but that didn't bother coach Shaheen Holloway or

his 6-foot-7, 195-pound power forward, KC Ndefo, who had 17 points and 10 rebounds and played bruising defense at the rim.

"I'm going to say this. It's going to come off a little crazy. I got guys from New Jersey and New York City," Holloway said. "You think we're scared of anything? You think we're worried about guys trying to muscle us and tough us out?"

Yep, the Jesuit school with an enrollment of 3,000 has a big Jersey attitude.

"We have played bigger teams the whole time. So them being a little bigger and stronger, it doesn't faze us. When you got tough, hard-nosed kids, they're ready to play," Holloway said.

They were ready enough to break the hearts of Kentuckians two times in three days and join Florida Gulf Coast (2013) and Oral Roberts (last year) as 15 seeds to reach a regional semifinal.

Saint Peter's (21-11) ended a 21-game winning streak and a memorable season for Murray State (31-3), located 265 miles from Lexington.

The memories will be lifelong for the Peacocks and Holloway, a North Jersey hoops lifer who played at Seton Hall and apprenticed there as an assistant. On Friday, Pirates coach Kevin Willard endorsed Holloway as his replacement if he departs in the offseason.

Brooks delivers late, Wolverines reach the Sweet 16

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Eli Brooks returned for one final college season with the goal of helping Michigan reach the Final Four.

Defying expectations, the Wolverines are halfway there.

Brooks scored seven of his 23 points in the final 3½ minutes and the 11th-seeded Wolverines booked the most surprising of their five straight Sweet 16 appearances, beating third-seeded Tennessee 78-68 on Saturday in the second round of South Region in the NCAA Tournament.

"I'm just trying to live in the moment right now and cherish the time we have with the people in my life right now at Michigan and enjoy the process of going through this tournament again and having that chance of getting our last goal," said Brooks, a fifth-year senior.

The Wolverines' five straight trips to the regional semifinals is the second-longest streak in the nation behind Gonzaga's. The Bulldogs beat Memphis on Sunday night to make their seventh consecutive Sweet 16.

East Region

North Carolina 93, Baylor 86: RJ Davis scored a career-high 30 points with a nifty layup

while being fouled in overtime, and the eighth-seeded Tar Heels blew a 25-point second-half lead but still found a way to beat the defending champion Bears in the second round in Fort Worth, Texas.

Brady Manek had a season-high 26 points before getting ejected because of a flagrant foul midway through the second half, right after his three-pointer had given the Tar Heels (26-9) their largest lead.

UCLA 72, Saint Mary's 56: Tyger Campbell scored 16 points and the fourth-seeded Bruins completed a more conventional path to the Sweet 16, beating the fifth-seeded Gaels in Portland, Ore.

UCLA (27-7), which went all the way from the First Four to the Final Four last year, instead knocked off two worse-seeded foes in Akron and then St. Mary's (26-8).

Midwest Region

Kansas 79, Creighton 72: Remy Martin scored 20 points, Ochai Agbaji put the Jayhawks ahead for good with his first basket early in the second half and they held off the Bluejays in Fort Worth, Texas, to advance to the Sweet 16.

Martin hadn't led top-seeded

Kansas (30-6) in scoring all season as the fifth-year senior transfer from Arizona State battled a sore knee, but he's done it in both NCAA Tournament games. The Jayhawks will face fourth-seeded Providence in the regional semifinals in Chicago.

Providence 79, Richmond 51: Noah Horchler scored 16 points and the Friars had their best three-point shooting performance of the season, routing the Spiders in Buffalo, N.Y., to reach their first Sweet 16 in 25 years.

Fourth-seeded Providence (27-5) looked like a juggernaut against Richmond, posting the most lopsided NCAA Tournament victory in program history.

The Friars controlled the game from the start and went up 21 on the Spiders (24-13) less than two minutes into the second half when Horchler swished a three from the corner. Providence shot 52% from the field, and a season-best 54.5% from the three. They came in shooting 34.3% from long range.

West Region

Arkansas 53, New Mexico State 48: Au'Diese Toney's fastbreak dunk capped the decisive run with about six minutes left and the fourth-seeded Ra-

zorbacks beat the No. 12-seeded Aggies in Buffalo, N.Y., to reach the Sweet 16 for the second consecutive year.

JD Notae scored 18 points before fouling out with 1:22 left and Jaylin Williams had 10 points and 15 rebounds for Arkansas (27-8). Notae's replacement, Chris Lykes, hit all four free-throw attempts in the final 10 seconds to secure the win after New Mexico State closed within two points on Teddy Allen's three-pointer with 12 seconds left.

Gonzaga 82, Memphis 78: Drew Timme scored 21 of his 25 points in the second half, and the top overall seeded Bulldogs rallied from a 10-point halftime deficit to beat the Tigers in Portland, Ore.

Trailing at the half for only the fourth time this season, Gonzaga leaned on its star junior to reach its seventh straight Sweet 16. The Bulldogs (28-3) will face No. 4 seed Arkansas in the West Region semifinals on Thursday in San Francisco.

Andrew Nemphard added 23 points for the Bulldogs, Rasir Bolton scored 17 and Gonzaga never trailed after a basket from Timme and Bolton's three-pointer with 10 minutes remaining that made it 61-57.

QB Stafford gets extension with Rams

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Quarterback Matthew Stafford has agreed to a four-year contract extension through 2026 with the Los Angeles Rams after winning the Super Bowl in his first season with the team.

The deal signed by Stafford on Saturday is worth \$160 million, with \$135 million guaranteed, according to ESPN.

Stafford is cashing in on his spectacular debut season with the Rams after 12 seasons with the Detroit Lions, who traded the 2009 No. 1 overall pick to Los Angeles a year ago. Stafford would be 38 years old in the final season of the extension.

Stafford is headed into the final year of his previous five-year, \$135 million deal signed in Detroit, but he repeatedly said he had no interest in going anywhere.

His new deal also is clearly calculated to allow the Rams to retain more of their championship core while adding new pieces, since Stafford almost certainly could have received more money at the top of the quarterback market. Aaron Rodgers' new deal with the Packers is essentially a three-year, \$150 million contract.

Stafford never won a playoff game in 12 seasons with the Lions, but he realized his enormous potential immediately after joining coach Sean McVay and a talented offense including Cooper Kupp, who be-

came the NFL's receiving leader in the first year of their partnership.

Stafford set a franchise record with 4,886 yards passing in the 17-game regular season, and he tied Kurt Warner's team record with 41 touchdown passes while leading the Rams to the NFC West title.

He then excelled in the first four playoff victories of his career, passing for 1,188 yards and nine touchdowns with just three interceptions. He led game-winning drives in the fourth quarter of the Rams' final three postseason games, including their Super Bowl victory over Cincinnati at SoFi Stadium.

The Rams also are working on a contract extension for All-Pro defensive tackle Aaron Donald.

Stafford's deal will alter the amount of room under the salary cap for the Rams, who have already lost several free agents this month. But Los Angeles signed talented veteran receiver Allen Robinson this week, and the team is hoping to retain Odell Beckham Jr. as well.

Source: Rams trade WR Woods to Titans

LOS ANGELES — The Super Bowl champion Rams continued to turn over their roster Saturday, trading wide receiver Robert Woods to the Tennessee Titans,

according to a person with knowledge of the deal.

The Rams are receiving a 2023 sixth-round draft pick in exchange for Woods.

Woods, who turns 30 in April, signed with the Rams in 2017 and has been a pillar for teams that made four playoff appearances and played in two Super Bowls in the last five seasons. He joins left tackle Andrew Whitworth, who retired, and punter Johnny Hekker, who was released, as core pieces no longer part of the team.

Woods is recovering from a season-ending knee injury he suffered in November but is expected to be ready for training camp. Woods was injured the day after the Rams signed receiver Odell Beckham Jr., who suffered a knee injury during the Rams' Super Bowl LVI victory over the Cincinnati Bengals.

Sources: CB Douglas, TE Tonyan staying with Pack

Free-agent cornerback Rasul Douglas and tight end Robert Tonyan are staying with the Green Bay Packers.

A person familiar with the situation says Douglas and the Packers have agreed to terms on a three-year, \$21 million deal that could get up to \$25.5 million. Another person familiar with the situation said Tonyan also has agreed to terms with the Packers.

Nelson scores hat trick in third, Islanders top Stars

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brock Nelson scored three times in the third period for his fourth career hat trick, Semyon Varlamov made 37 saves and the New York Islanders topped the Dallas Stars 4-2 on Saturday.

Ryan Pulock also scored for New York, which extended its point streak to six games and won for the fifth time in six games.

Denis Gurianov and Jacob Peterson each had a goal and an assist, but the Stars lost for the fourth time in five games. Jake Oettinger made 21 saves in his 33rd appearance this season.

Nelson scored twice within a span of 1:38 to give the Islanders a two-goal advantage in the early portion of the third period.

"From early days of the season, we said that we believe in this group and knew we had the potential to sort of rip off a stretch like this," Nelson said. "This group still has

all belief in the world that we can go out there and compete with anybody and beat every team every night."

Oilers 6, Devils 3: Evander Kane scored twice, Connor McDavid had a goal and a pair of assists, and host Edmonton used a four-goal third period to top New Jersey for its fifth straight victory.

Penguins 4, Coyotes 1: Evgeni Malkin and Sidney Crosby scored third-period goals to help Pittsburgh win at Arizona.

Rangers 2, Lightning 1: Mika Zibanejad scored a tiebreaking power-play goal with 16 seconds left in the third period and New York won at Tampa Bay.

Golden Knights 5, Kings 1: Logan Thompson stopped 37 shots and Vegas beat Los Angeles.

Wild 3, Blackhawks 1: Ryan Hartman scored with 3:13 left in the game, and host Minnesota beat Chicago to finish off a four-game season sweep of its Central Division

rival.

Blue Jackets 5, Blues 4: Gus Nyquist, Patrik Laine and Emil Bemstrom each had a goal and an assist, lifting host Columbus over St. Louis and sending the Blues to their third straight loss.

Predators 6, Maple Leafs 3: Eeli Tolvanen, Filip Forsberg, Matt Duchene and Yakov Trenin each had a goal and an assist to lead host Nashville past Toronto.

Canadiens 5, Senators 1: Jake Allen made 29 saves for his first victory since late November, helping host Montreal beat Ottawa.

Kraken 4, Red Wings 2: Yanni Gourde scored two of host Seattle's four goals in the third period, including the winner with 6:47 remaining.

Flames 5, Canucks 2: Matthew Tkachuk had a goal and two assists, and Rasmus Andersson added a goal and an assist in Calgary's victory at Vancouver.

James moves up to second on scoring list in Lakers' loss

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — LeBron James passed Karl Malone on the career scoring list, leaving only Kareem Abdul-Jabbar still to catch.

Then the Los Angeles Lakers wasted another stellar performance by their star.

James came into the night needing 19 points to tie Malone. He ended up scoring double that, but the Washington Wizards rallied from a 16-point deficit to win 127-119 on Saturday night.

James said he couldn't appreciate the milestone as much in a loss.

"Obviously at some point I'll be able to look back at this moment, but right now the feeling I have — I can't separate it," James said. "We had a great opportunity to pick up some more momentum."

In addition to James' 38 points, Russell Westbrook scored 22 in his return to Washington, but the Lakers' small lineups couldn't stop 7-foot-3 Kristaps Porzingis, who scored 16 of his 27 points in the final quarter.

Porzingis connected on a three-pointer with 38 seconds left to put the Wizards up by six, and James couldn't answer at the other end. Washington outscored Los Angeles 34-20 in the fourth quarter.

The Lakers, who won at Toronto on Friday night in overtime, haven't earned back-to-back victories since a four-game winning streak from Dec. 31 to Jan. 7.

Malone scored 36,928 points in his career. Abdul-Jabbar's record of 38,387 is in reach if James stays healthy.

"I will not allow myself to think about it. I've always just played the game the way I've been playing it over the years, and these things have just happened organically by just going out and playing the game the right way," James said. "Hope to accomplish that at some point in my career, but I won't think about it too much."

Timberwolves 139, Bucks 119: Karl-Anthony Towns had 25 points and 11 rebound and Minnesota beat visiting Milwaukee, with the Bucks missing Giannis Antetokounmpo because of soreness in his right knee.

Anthony Edwards also scored 25 points for the Timberwolves in a matchup that turned testy early. Minnesota guard Patrick Beverley and the Bucks' George Hill were ejected after a first-quarter skirmish.

Hornets 129, Mavericks 108: Miles Bridges scored 23 points, P.J. Washington added a season-high 21 and Charlotte routed road-weary Dallas for its fourth straight victory.

Terry Rozier scored 18 points, and LaMelo Ball and Kelly Oubre each had 17 points for the Hornets. They shot 20-for-42 from three-point range.

Luka Doncic had 37 points and eight threes for the Mavericks. They were playing their fifth road game in eight nights and on the second night of a back-to-back.

Cavaliers 113, Pistons 109: All-Star point guard Darius Garland had 24 points and 12 assists, and Cleveland beat visiting Detroit.

The Cavaliers reached 41 victories, guaranteeing their first non-losing season in four years.

Investigator says drug kingpin targeted Ortiz

Associated Press

BOSTON — A Dominican drug trafficker who was jealous of David Ortiz and felt disrespected by him had him shot at a Dominican nightclub in 2019, according to private investigators the Red Sox slugger hired to look into the attack that nearly killed him.

The findings by former Boston police commissioner Edward Davis reported by the Boston Globe on Saturday contradict the theory of the crime developed by Dominican prosecutors.

Davis told the newspaper that he identified the drug trafficker César Peralta as having orchestrated the shooting by placing a bounty on Ortiz and sanctioning the hit squad that tried to kill him. Dominican authorities did not cooperate with the private investigation.

Peralta is being held in held without bail in Puerto Rico on unrelated charges of conspiracy to import cocaine and heroin. The U.S. Treasury designated Peralta a drug kingpin in 2019, and he was extradited to the U.S. territory in December.

Ortiz's spokesperson, Joe Baerlein, told the Globe that Davis' findings were withheld for Ortiz's safety until Peralta was in U.S. custody.

Peralta has not been charged in relation to Ortiz's shooting. Peralta's lawyer, Joaquin Perez, said Peralta had nothing to do with the attempt on Ortiz's life.

"As bad as César Peralta is, it's not even close to being in the ballpark to say he had something to do with this," Perez said.

Perez described Ortiz and Peralta as "close friends." Ortiz told The Globe he knew Peralta only casually and that he was "sad, confused, angry, all kinds of emotions" when he received the news from Davis and Ric Prado, a former high-ranking CIA official who participated in

the inquiry.

Dominican authorities have said the target was meant to be Sixto David Fernandez, who was sharing a table with Ortiz when he was shot. Authorities said the hit men confused Fernandez with Ortiz, one of the most popular Dominican ballplayers ever.

A 10-time All-Star, Ortiz helped the Red Sox end their 86-year championship drought in 2004 and batted .688 against the St. Louis Cardinals in 2013 to win the Series MVP.

Twins sign right-handed reliever Smith

FORT MYERS, Fla. — The Minnesota Twins and right-handed reliever Joe Smith finalized a one-year contract on Sunday, adding a veteran arm to a bullpen in need of more depth.

Smith pitched in 50 combined games last season for Houston and Seattle, posting a 4.99 ERA in 39⅓ innings. The side-arm thrower has pitched for seven major league teams over 15 years, with a career 3.09 ERA and a .229 opponent batting average. He opted out of the 2020 season with the Astros due to COVID-19 concerns.

Smith turns 38 on Tuesday. He was drafted in the third round in 2006 by the New York Mets and made his debut with the club the following year.

Marlins sign OF Soler to 3-year deal

MIAMI — The Miami Marlins are signing who they believe will be their impact bat.

The Marlins are signing outfielder Jorge Soler to a three-year deal worth \$36 million that includes opt outs after both the 2022 and 2023 seasons, a source confirmed to the Miami Herald on Saturday. MLB.com's Mark Feisand was first to report.

Soler, 30, is a career .246 hitter with 121 home runs.