

Ukraine holds Bakhmut; Russia closes in

Associated Press

CHAVIS YAR, Ukraine — Ukrainian military leaders expressed determination Monday to hold onto Bakhmut as Russian forces encroached on the devastated eastern city they have sought to capture for six months at the cost of thousands of lives.

Less than a week ago, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the defenders might retreat from Bakhmut and fall back to nearby positions.

But Zelenskyy's office said Monday that he chaired a meeting in which the country's top military brass "spoke in favor of continuing the defense operation and further strengthening our positions in Bakhmut."

Intense Russian shelling targeted the city in the Donetsk region and nearby villages as Moscow deployed more resources to try to finish off Bakhmut's resistance, according to local officials.

"Civilians are fleeing the region to escape Russian shelling continuing round the clock," Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said.

Russian forces that invaded Ukraine just over a year ago have been unable to deliver a

blow that would allow them to seize Bakhmut. Analysts say the city does not have major strategic value and that its capture would be unlikely to serve as a turning point in the conflict.

The city's importance has become symbolic. For Russian President Vladimir Putin, prevailing there would finally deliver some good news from the front. For Kyiv the display of grit and defiance reinforces a message that Ukraine is holding on after a year of brutal attacks, justifying continued support from its Western allies.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin endorsed that view Monday, saying during a visit to Jordan that Bakhmut has "more of a symbolic value than ... strategic and operational value."

Moscow, he added, is "continuing to pour in a lot of ill-trained and ill-equipped troops" into Bakhmut, while Ukraine is patiently "building combat power" elsewhere with Western military support ahead of a possible spring offensive.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, noted that urban

warfare favors the defender but that Kyiv's smartest option now may be to withdraw to positions that are easier to defend.

In recent days, Ukrainian units destroyed two key bridges just outside Bakhmut, including one linking it to the nearby hilltop town of Chasiv Yar along the last remaining Ukrainian resupply route, according to U.K. military intelligence officials and other Western analysts. Demolishing the bridges could slow the Russian offensive.

"Ukrainian forces are unlikely to withdraw from Bakhmut all at once and may pursue a gradual fighting withdrawal to exhaust Russian forces through continued urban warfare," the ISW said in an assessment published late Sunday.

The Bakhmut battle has also served to expose Russian military shortcomings and bitter divisions.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the millionaire owner of the Wagner Group military company that has spearheaded the Bakhmut offensive, has been at loggerheads with the Russian Defense Ministry and repeatedly accused it of failing to provide his forces with ammunition.

IG: Pre-positioned gear didn't always meet standards

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

When thousands of U.S.-based soldiers rapidly deployed to Europe last year following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, some of the combat gear they pulled from storage depots was substandard, according to a new Defense Department report.

The Pentagon's inspector general examined how Army logistics and infantry units managed the fielding of thousands of pieces of equipment taken from pre-positioned stockpile locations in Europe.

The IG concluded that shortfalls within the Kaiserslautern, Germany-headquartered 405th Army Field Support Bri-

gade resulted in some gear being poorly maintained.

"The issued equipment had operational readiness rates below 90%," the IG stated, noting that Army regulations set the minimum standard at 90%.

The Feb. 27 report, which was heavily redacted, did not specify how much equipment was unusable.

In March 2022, for the first time, the service issued gear from its Europe-based Army Prepositioned Stock-2 warehouses to an entire armored brigade combat team arriving in Germany from the United States.

The U.S. deployed an additional 7,000 soldiers, including those from 1st Armored Bri-

gade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, in the immediate aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

The IG credited the 405th Army Field Support Brigade for quickly getting combat equipment into the hands of those incoming soldiers. But going forward, the unit should update various maintenance procedures to ensure that the equipment is mission ready, the IG said.

The Army concurred with the report's findings in an attached statement.

Brigade officials told the IG that equipment ranging from Paladin howitzers to Abrams tanks and other vehicles did not have proper combat con-

figurations. As a result, that "limited the speed of the issuance of numerous vehicles," the IG said.

In Europe, the Army relies on numerous pre-positioned weapons sites for units rotating in and out of the Continent. The purpose is to have a full range of combat equipment at the ready for incoming ground forces, whose deployments would be slowed if gear needed to be hauled across the Atlantic Ocean.

The sites also have played a role in U.S. weapons supplies to Ukraine, which has received everything from mobile rocket systems known as HIMARS to infantry combat vehicles from the Army's depots in Europe.

DOD civilians: Health care change not enough

BY KELLY AGEE
AND ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A move by the Defense Health Agency to ease Defense Department employees' access to health care at military hospitals is encouraging but not quite enough, employee advocates said Monday.

The agency on Friday reversed itself and said DOD civilian employees in the Indo-Pacific region may seek treatment again at base hospitals for chronic health conditions like diabetes or high-blood pressure. But they may only schedule appointments on a space-available basis, according to a DHA memo to Indo-Pacific region director Army Maj. Gen. Joseph Heck.

DHA, under a congressional mandate, on Jan. 1 limited chronic care at base hospitals to

only beneficiaries under Tricare Prime, the military's top-tier medical plan, which includes active-duty service members, their families and eligible retirees. DOD civilian workers, including agency employees, contractors, schoolteachers, analysts and others, were limited to space-available appointments only for sudden onset, or acute ailments.

Space-available appointments for DOD civilians are typically few in number, advertised on short notice and booked quickly. The Friday memo instructs military hospitals to use "standard processes" to find room on their schedules to treat "the greatest number of patients" within their capabilities.

Rescinding the ban on chronic care was an "immediate gift to everyone" who struggled to find routine health care, renew pre-

scriptions and find referrals, Randi Wilson, a health care advocate, said Monday. But it didn't fix everything, she said by Facebook Messenger.

"What it does not fix is our access to emergency services, which has claimed several lives and makes parents afraid for their children," she said. "It also doesn't address the fact that our [medical treatment facilities] were already under-resourced and not able to meet active-duty service members' needs."

Military hospitals exist to provide health care for Tricare beneficiaries and "maintain medical readiness of the force," according to the DHA memo. But it also said DOD civilian employees and contractors are "critical to our mission success."

At least one U.S. base in Japan, Camp Zama, on Monday began making space-available appoint-

ments for DOD civilians' "acute and non-acute" medical needs, according to a post on the official Facebook page for the Army Medical Department in Japan. Camp Zama, southwest of Tokyo, is the headquarters of U.S. Army Japan.

Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy, a Facebook group that pressured DHA to reverse the restrictions, spread word of the change over the weekend. Group members expressed cautious optimism.

"Yes, we celebrate a victory, but there is clearly more to be done," said Em Powers Hunter, a group member, in a comment posted Sunday on the group's page.

Wilson, a DOD analyst at Yokota who created the online forum, said the change "is a win," but she worries it may be suddenly reversed.

USS John Finn arrives in Japan to new homeport

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn steamed through Tokyo Bay and anchored at its new homeport Saturday, where it's scheduled to replace a cruiser slated for decommissioning.

The ship departed its former homeport, Naval Base San Diego, on Feb. 16 and made the approximately two-week journey across the Pacific before arriving at the home of the 7th Fleet, where it joined Destroyer Squadron 15 and Task Force 71, 7th Fleet announced in a Saturday news release.

"USS John Finn is another fantastic addition to our team here in Japan," said Capt. Walter Mainor, commander of Task Force 71,

in the news release.

The John Finn will ultimately replace the guided-missile cruiser USS Shiloh, which is due to be decommissioned at Naval Base Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Task Force 71 spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Joe Keiley told Stars and Stripes by email Monday. Keiley declined to comment on the timeline for the Shiloh's retirement due to operational security.

The John Finn made history as the first Navy warship to shoot down an intercontinental ballistic missile with an SM-3 Block IIA interceptor missile during a November 2020 test.

The ship, first launched in 2017, is named after Lt. John William Finn, who was the first Navy sailor to earn the Medal of Honor during World War II, according to the Navy Department of Library.

Scholz warns of 'consequences' if China sends arms to Russia

Associated Press

BERLIN — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz says there would be "consequences" if China sent weapons to Russia for Moscow's war in Ukraine, but he's fairly optimistic that Beijing will refrain from doing so.

Scholz's comments came in an interview with CNN that aired Sunday, two days after he visited President Joe Biden. U.S. officials have warned recently that China could begin providing arms and ammunition to Moscow. Ahead of his trip, Scholz had urged Beijing to press Russia to withdraw its troops from Ukraine.

Asked by CNN if he could imagine sanctioning China if it did aid Russia, Scholz replied: "I think it would have consequences, but we are now in a stage where we are making clear that this should not happen, and I'm relatively opti-

mistic that we will be successful with our request in this case, but we will have to look at (it) and we have to be very, very cautious."

He didn't elaborate on the nature of the consequences. Germany has Europe's biggest economy, and China has been its biggest trading partner in recent years.

Back in Germany on Sunday, Scholz was asked after his Cabinet met with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen whether he had received concrete evidence from the U.S. that China was considering weapons deliveries and whether he would back sanctions against Beijing if it helped arm Russia.

"We all agree that there must be no weapons deliveries, and the Chinese government has stated that it wouldn't deliver any," the chancellor replied. He didn't address the sanctions question.

Norfolk Southern to pay Pa. millions

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Norfolk Southern has pledged several million dollars to cover the cost of the response and recovery in Pennsylvania after last month's derailment of a train carrying toxic chemicals just across the border in Ohio, Gov. Josh Shapiro said Monday.

Shapiro's office said he met with Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw on Thursday and secured what they call an initial commitment for financial aid as the cleanup from the Feb. 3 derailment continues.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has ordered Norfolk Southern to cover the costs of cleanup from the derail-

ment that toppled 38 rail cars in East Palestine, Ohio.

No one was hurt, but concerns over an explosion led state and local officials to approve releasing and burning toxic vinyl chloride from five tanker cars.

The resulting fire prompted the evacuation of half of East Palestine and the surrounding area near the Pennsylvania border.

Shapiro said Norfolk Southern will pay \$5 million to reimburse fire departments for equipment that was contaminated or damaged in the response and \$1 million to Beaver and Lawrence counties to help business owners and residents whose livelihoods

were damaged.

Another nearly \$1.4 million will go to state agencies that responded, including for setting up a health clinic for residents, Shapiro said.

Shapiro's office said he will push Norfolk Southern to cover any additional costs that accumulate.

Federal and state officials have repeatedly said it's safe for evacuated residents to return to the area and that air testing in the town and inside hundreds of homes hasn't detected any concerning levels of contaminants. However, some residents say they're still suffering from illnesses nearly a month later.

35 detained after violence at Ga. police training site

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Nearly three dozen people have been detained after flaming bottles and rocks were thrown at officers during a protest at "Cop City," a new police training center that's been the site of prior demonstrations and the death of a protester, Atlanta police said Monday.

Atlanta Police Chief Darin Schierbaum said at a midnight news conference that several pieces of construction equipment were set on fire Sunday at the site for the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center in DeKalb County.

It was the latest flare-up in a series of demonstrations in a cause that has drawn to Georgia both anti-police demonstrators and environmentalists who call themselves defenders of the forest.

Surveillance video released by police show a piece of heavy equipment in flames at the facility under construction that opponents call "Cop City." It was among multiple pieces of construction equipment destroyed, police said.

Protesters dressed in all black threw large rocks, bricks, Molotov cocktails and fireworks at police officers Sunday at the construction site, police said.

Other police agencies stepped in to assist city officers, and no officers were injured, Schierbaum said. Officers used nonlethal enforcement methods to disperse the crowd and detain those involved, he said.

"This was a very violent attack, very vio-

lent attack," Schierbaum said. "This wasn't about a public safety training center. This was about anarchy ... and we are addressing that quickly."

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp said the people involved "chose destruction and vandalism over legitimate protest, yet again demonstrating the radical intent behind their actions."

"As I've said before, domestic terrorism will NOT be tolerated in this state," Kemp said in a statement Monday.

"We will not rest until those who use violence and intimidation for an extremist end are brought to full justice," he said.

The names of those in custody and the criminal charges against them were not immediately available early Monday, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. But Schierbaum said many were not from the Atlanta area.

In January, a 26-year-old environmental activist was shot to death by law officers in the forest where the training center is being built. Demonstrations spread to downtown Atlanta on Jan. 21, when a police cruiser was set ablaze, rocks were thrown and fireworks were launched at a skyscraper that houses the Atlanta Police Foundation. Windows were shattered in that building and others.

The Atlanta City Council approved the \$90 million Atlanta Public Safety Training Center in 2021, saying a state-of-the-art campus would replace substandard offerings and boost police morale.

1 dead, 9 hurt in stampede at NY concert

Associated Press

ROCHESTER, N.Y. — False fears of a shooting at a rap concert in Rochester, New York, sent a crowd surging toward the exits, killing one person and injuring eight others, police said.

Police found "no evidence to support a shooting having occurred" inside the concert late Sunday featuring rappers GloRilla and Finesse2tymes at the Main Street Armory, Rochester police Lt. Nicholas Adams said in a statement. A 33-year-old woman died and two people were in critical condition, the department said.

Six additional people were dropped off by private vehicle at hospitals with injuries that were not considered life-threatening, the Democrat & Chronicle newspaper reported.

Officers responded around 11 p.m. to initial reports of gunshots fired inside, Adams said, but later determined injuries weren't consistent with gunshot wounds.

"The injuries appear to be as a result of a large crowd pushing towards the exits following accounts of individuals hearing what they believed to be gunshots," Adams said.

Fatal crowd surges have been a recurring disaster at concerts and other large events in the U.S. and around the world, including a 2021 concert by rapper Travis Scott in which 10 people died.

Snow a no-show for some wintry US cities

Associated Press

BOSTON — Growing up in New England, Leah Ofsevit's most cherished childhood memories were blanketed in snow. She remembers running barefoot outside with her brother at the first sign of it, building snowmen and ice castles most winters, strapping on skis as a toddler.

Ofsevit and her husband, Jeremy Garczynski, want to pass those traditions onto their children, 3-year-old Lewis and 8-month-old Asher. They were hoping this would be the year: Tiny skis were purchased for Lewis, and they planned to ski their favorite Massachusetts ski trails while dragging Asher behind them in a sled.

But three months into winter, with March arriving, their skis and sleds are mostly gathering dust. She doesn't like it one bit.

"It's not what I envisioned for my kids," says Ofsevit, who was on her high school cross-country ski team and lives in Melrose, just outside Boston. "Its such a big part of being a kid in New England."

For much of the eastern United States, from Massachusetts all the way down to parts of West Virginia and into Ohio, winter has been a bust. While parts of the Midwest

have been hit with repeated snowstorms, much of California including Los Angeles got blanketed of late and even parts of the Southwest saw near-blizzard conditions, many East Coast cities have missed out.

Boston, known for nasty nor'easters and a blizzard last year that dumped nearly two feet of snow on the city, had seen just over 11 inches as of last week compared to an average of 38.6, according to data from the National Weather Service. Philadelphia has gotten only 0.3 inches compared to an average of 19.2. New York, which typically gets over two feet by now, has seen only 2.2 inches. Similar shortfalls have been seen in Providence, R.I.; Pittsburgh; Washington, D.C.; and parts of West Virginia.

There have been exceptions like Buffalo, which in November got walloped thanks to a lake-effect storm, caused by cold air picking up moisture from warmer lakes. Yet, says David Robinson, a Rutgers University geography professor and the New Jersey state climatologist: "For the most part, it's been a winterless winter."

A big reason for the lack of snow has been the warmer conditions, Robinson says — conditions driven in part by human-induced

climate change. The northeast is among the fastest warming regions in the country.

The region has seen plenty of precipitation, but often it has been too warm to snow. Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island and Vermont all had their warmest January on record, while Indiana, New York and Pennsylvania their second warmest, according to the the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

But other factors are at play.

La Niña, which involves a large-scale cooling of ocean surface temperatures, has led to unusual cool conditions in the eastern Pacific Ocean. As a result, the jet stream, which would bring colder conditions to the region, has kept that air closer to the Canadian border rather than dropping down into the northeast.

The polar vortex, which spins like a whirling top above the North Pole, also remained strong through mid-January, which kept the colder air bottled up in Canada, according to Judah Cohen, who studies the relationship between the polar vortex and the weather and is the director of seasonal forecasting for Verisk AER.

Biden reelection bid sees pushback from some Dems

Associated Press

LACONIA, N.H. — Steve Shurtleff was at Joe Biden's side in 2019 when he filed papers in the New Hampshire State House to run for president.

He repeatedly trekked across the state with Biden to court primary voters. And when Biden ultimately won the presidency, it was Shurtleff, then the Democratic state House speaker, who proudly sealed the envelope that carried New Hampshire's four electoral votes — including his own name — to the U.S. Senate.

But on the eve of a new election season, Shurtleff, like a majority of Democrats across the country, feels that one term is enough.

"In my heart of hearts, no," Shurtleff said when asked if he wants Biden to run again. "I think a lot of people just don't want to say it."

Democrats across New Hampshire are upset with the Democratic president for trying to end the state's status as home to the first-in-the-nation presidential primary. But their concerns about Biden run much deeper, in line with a majority of Democratic voters nationwide, who question the 80-year-old president's plans to soon launch his re-

election campaign.

Just 37% of Democrats nationwide want the president to seek a second term, according to a poll released last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That was down from 52% in the weeks before last year's midterm elections.

Many worry about Biden's age. Others, like Shurtleff, are upset about the administration's messy withdrawal from Afghanistan. And the party's progressive wing has never been enthusiastic about Biden, who is perceived as a moderate despite his lengthy list of achievements.

The White House cast Biden's perceived weakness within his own party as an exaggerated narrative that he has repeatedly proven wrong.

"We're aware pundits' attitude toward President Biden is unchanged from before he earned the nomination faster than anyone since 2004, won the most votes in American history, built the strongest legislative record in generations and led the best midterm outcome for a new Democratic president in 60 years," Biden spokesman Andrew Bates said. "Based on comparing the accuracy of

our predictions versus theirs, we are happy for this dynamic to continue."

Still, there's a risk of a disconnect between rank-and-file Democrats and the party's establishment. While voters are signaling unease about the prospect of another Biden campaign, Democratic governors, senators and congressional representatives are virtually unanimous in supporting Biden's reelection.

One exception may be New Hampshire, a small swing state whose electoral votes could be critical in a tight general election. The state has challenged Biden before.

Voters there served Biden an embarrassing fifth-place finish in the 2020 Democratic primary. New Hampshire polls were still open when he decamped to South Carolina, where his presidential ambitions were revived by a decisive win. That state is now Biden's pick to lead the 2024 presidential primary calendar.

Interviews with angry New Hampshire Democrats across state government and local Democratic committees suggest there is some appetite for a serious primary challenger in 2024. But top-tier prospects don't seem to be interested.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Brain-eating amoeba causes person's death

FL PUNTA GORDA — A person in southwest Florida died after being infected with an extremely rare brain-eating amoeba, health officials said.

The Florida Department of Health in Charlotte County confirmed the death Thursday. The agency had previously issued an alert last month, warning residents about the *Naegleria fowleri* infection.

Health officials said last month that the infection might have been caused by sinus rinse practices using tap water, but an investigation is ongoing. Sinus solutions should be made using only distilled or sterile water. Tap water should be boiled for at least one minute and cooled before sinus rinsing.

Naegleria fowleri is a single-celled organism that lives in soil and warm fresh water, such as lakes, rivers and hot springs, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It can cause a brain infection when water containing the amoeba goes up the nose. Only about three people in the United States get infected each year, but these infections are usually fatal.

Company picks state for new \$2B EV plant

SC COLUMBIA — A Volkswagen Group-backed automotive company is planning to open a \$2 billion electric truck and SUV manufacturing plant just outside of Columbia.

Scout Motors Inc. and South Carolina officials said the company would be establishing its first manufacturing plant in Blythe-

wood at an industrial site. At full capacity, more than 200,000 vehicles may be produced annually at the facility, which is expected to create at least 4,000 permanent jobs, Gov. Henry McMaster's office said in a news release.

Scout Motors, an independent company headquartered in Virginia and backed by Volkswagen, plans to produce all-electric trucks and SUVs in the style of the Scout vehicles produced by International Harvester between 1960 and 1980. Vehicle production is targeted to begin by the end of 2026, according to the news release.

Governor, high court at odds over execution

AZ PHOENIX — Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs vowed Friday that her administration won't carry out an execution even though the state Supreme Court scheduled it over the objections of the state's new attorney general.

The Democratic governor's promise not to execute Aaron Gunches on April 6 for his murder conviction in a 2002 killing came a day after the state Supreme Court said it must grant an execution warrant if certain appellate proceedings have concluded — and that those requirements were met in Gunches' case.

Last week, Hobbs appointed retired U.S. Magistrate Judge David Duncan to examine the state's procurement of lethal injection drugs and other death penalty protocols due to the state's history of mismanaging executions.

Attorney General Kris Mayes' office has said it won't seek court orders to carry out executions

while Hobbs' review is underway.

Mayes, a Democrat who took office in January, tried to withdraw a request by her Republican predecessor, Mark Brnovich, for a warrant to execute Gunches. The court declined to withdraw the request Thursday.

Ex-wrestler pleads guilty again in welfare fraud

MS JACKSON — A former pro wrestler pleaded guilty Thursday to a federal charge related to mispending of welfare money that was supposed to help needy families in Mississippi, one of the poorest states in the U.S.

Brett DiBiase faces up to five years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine for his plea to conspiracy to defraud the federal government. He pleaded guilty in December 2020 to a state charge of making false representations to defraud the government.

State sentencing was delayed, and DiBiase has been cooperating with state and federal investigators looking at others in the case, Hinds County District Attorney Jody Owens said.

Police ticket man for feeding homeless people

TX HOUSTON — Houston police ticketed a man for giving food to homeless people outside a public library, provoking outrage from a charitable group and plans to challenge a long-standing city ordinance.

City regulations on who can provide free meals outdoors to those in need were enacted in 2012. The ordinance requires such groups to get permission from property owners if they

feed more than five people but it wasn't enforced until recently, Nick Cooper, a volunteer with Food Not Bombs, said Thursday.

For decades, the group has provided meals four nights a week outside the Houston Public Library without incident.

But the city recently posted a notice at the site warning that police would soon start issuing citations, and the first came Wednesday night.

Researcher to spend 100 days in underwater hotel

FL KEY LARGO — An underwater researcher submerged Wednesday to begin a 100-day mission in the Florida Keys, attempting to set a record for underwater human habitation at ambient pressure, as well as educating students and conducting medical and marine science research.

Retired U.S. Navy Cmdr. Joseph Dituri, 55, who holds a doctorate in biomedical engineering and teaches hyperbaric medicine, plans to live and work until June 9 at Jules' Undersea Lodge. The facility, situated 30 feet beneath the surface in a Key Largo lagoon, was originally fabricated as a marine research laboratory and converted into an underwater hotel in 1986.

The previous record for human subsea habitation at ambient pressure is 73 days, set in 2014 at Jules' by two Tennessee university educators.

Dituri, a Tampa resident, plans to conduct online high school and college classes in hyperbaric medicine and welcome some 40 young divers, who will spend 24 hours undersea with him to become certified aquanauts.

— From wire reports

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and Military News

Military prospects see NFL hopes rising

Associated Press

Kyle Patterson feels fortunate.

The tight end from Air Force was able to live out a childhood dream as one of 319 invitees to the NFL's annual scouting combine in Indianapolis. If all goes well, he — like dozens of other rookies — will be vying for roster spots by the end of summer.

Patterson will eventually fulfill the commitment he made to his country, too. For now, though, thanks to a provision included in last year's omnibus spending bill, Patterson and linebacker Andre Carter II can defer their service until after pursuing NFL careers.

"We're allowed to go straight into the league and be able to defer our service, but the lower classes will have to serve a couple of years before they come back to the league — if that opportunity presents itself to them," Patterson said. "So kind of extremely grateful it will be grandfathered in and have that opportunity to go direct."

The late change could explain why Patterson received one of the precious combine invitations.

In Carter's case, it could de-

termine whether he just gets a chance to make a team or become the highest draft pick out of Army since Heisman Trophy winner Glenn Davis and offensive lineman DeWitt "Tex" Coulter were selected No. 2 and No. 7, respectively, in 1947.

The 6-foot-6, 256-pound edge rusher was once projected as a potential first-round pick and still might be selected in the top 50.

The previous rule could have severely damaged Carter's draft stock, forcing teams to wait years before getting him on the field. When federal lawmakers realized the impact, a bipartisan coalition of congressional leaders acted quickly.

Even amid all the uncertainty, Carter never regretted choosing West Point — or making the five-year promise that comes with it.

"One (reason) was the ability to play Division I football and then also the opportunity to get a great, world-class education," he said. "And then the opportunity to serve something bigger than yourself — serving in the Army and leading soldiers."

Carter would be the latest in a long lineage of NFL stars

from military academies.

The list includes Hall of Fame quarterback Roger Staubach, a two-time Super Bowl champ with Dallas and the 1963 Heisman Trophy winner from Navy; three-time Super Bowl champ Chad Hennings, an Air Force grad and longtime defensive lineman with the Cowboys; and Coulter, who retired in 1950 to become a newspaper reporter and cartoonist only to return in 1952 and then make two Pro Bowls.

More recent names include offensive lineman Alejandro Villanueva of Army, tight end Garrett Griffin of Air Force and quarterback Malcolm Perry of Navy.

Many college and pro athletes grew up with parents or other relatives who served, giving them insight into those who choose the disciplined, regimented military lifestyle and how those lessons can be used on the football field.

"My dad has been on three deployments in my lifetime," former Georgia offensive lineman Warren McClendon said. "So just seeing the sacrifices he has made, that he made for his family, I definitely feel for him. It shows you what type of peo-

ple they are, their character."

Carter, a field artillery officer by training, also happens to be a defensive disrupter.

The lanky pass rusher recorded 85 tackles, 25½ for losses, and 20 sacks over the past two seasons. In 2021, he broke Army's season record with 15½ sacks but opted not to work out at the combine.

Patterson's projection is less clear. He checked in at 6-foot-6, 260 pounds, with a hand measurement of 9¼ inches, but he was primarily a blocker and caught just 18 career passes at Air Force. Still, he has an NFL pedigree as the son of Shawn Patterson, Green Bay's second-round pick in 1988.

And while Carter and the younger Patterson took different paths to the draft than the other 317 players in Indy, both know what the future holds and that they're the beneficiaries of good decisions and good luck.

"It's something I'm really grateful for, the opportunity not only to serve in the Army but also to have a chance to play in the NFL," Carter said. "I want to represent the military academy, the Army, with the utmost respect while I'm playing."

No. 1 Houston tops Memphis at buzzer for 11th straight win

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Jamal Shead scored 16 points, including the winning basket as time ran out, and top-ranked Houston escaped a second-half rally by Memphis for a 67-65 win Sunday in the regular-season finale.

Memphis' Kendrick Davis drove to the basket with nine seconds left and tied the game at 65. Houston chose not to call time out.

Shead then maneuvered along the top of the key, created some space from defender Elijah McCadden with a step-back move, let it go from about 18 feet and saw the ball nestle through the net as the lights around the basket showed time had expired.

"I knew coach (Kelvin Sampson) wouldn't call time out because we've been in that situation before and he trusts me," Shead said, adding: "God willing, I was able to make that shot."

No. 5 Purdue 76, Illinois 71: Brandon Newman scored 19 points, Zach Edey added 17 and the host Boilermakers held on to beat Illinois and become the first team to win the Big Ten title by three or more games since 2014.

Braden Smith added 15 points for Purdue (26-5, 15-5), who led by 24 early in the second half before the Illini rallied.

Matthew Mayer led the Illini (20-11, 11-9) with 16 points, followed by Terrence Shannon Jr. with 13, Sencire Harris with 11 and Luke Goode with 10.

No. 15 Indiana 75, Michigan 73 (OT): Trayce Jackson-Davis had 27 points, nine rebounds and six assists in his final home game, and the host Hoosiers forced a steal on Michigan's final possession of overtime.

Indiana (21-10, 12-8) clinched a double bye in Friday's Big Ten Tournament quarterfinals by rebounding from their most lopsided home loss since 2017.

Penn State 65, No. 21 Maryland 64: Camren Wynter made a layup with less than a second remaining to lift host Penn State over Maryland.

Jalen Pickett scored 16 points, Andrew Funk had 14 and Myles Dread had 11 for the Nittany Lions (19-12, 10-10 Big Ten), who trailed by as many as 16 late in the first half.

Durant hits tiebreaker in Suns' win

Associated Press

DALLAS — Kevin Durant's tiebreaker jumper was like so many before — right on target in the closing seconds.

Luka Doncic's potential tying floater moments later in front of the rim was unlike most of his — spinning around and out.

What happened next was familiar — a little bad blood from last season's playoff series spilling, with Doncic and Devin Booker nose-to-nose before getting double technicals.

Durant scored 37 points, including the go-ahead shot, to lift the Phoenix Suns to a 130-126 victory over the Dallas Mavericks on Sunday in a thrilling showcase of stars for both teams.

The first meeting between Durant and Dallas' Kyrie Irving since they were traded by Brooklyn before the deadline last month was even at 126-all when Durant pulled up over Tim Hardaway Jr. and Irving, who scrambled over for the double team when Durant went to his left.

Too late.

"Nobody's ever going to retreat when they guard me," Durant said. "So sometimes I've got to veer off instead of straight-line driving it. I felt like I had a good handle on the ball. Once I had it on my hip I felt like I was in good position to stop on a dime."

Lakers 113, Warriors 105: Anthony Davis scored 39 points, including 12 in the fourth quarter, and host Los Angeles held on for a victory over Golden State despite Stephen Curry's 27 points in his return.

The Lakers led most of the game, but a three-pointer by Golden State's Anthony Lamb tied it at 91 with 5:37 remaining. Los Angeles ran off seven straight points and went up 103-95.

Knicks 131, Celtics 129 (2 OT): Immanuel Quickley scored a career-high 38 points, playing 55 minutes in place of injured starter Jalen Brunson, and visiting New York outlasted Boston in two overtimes for its season-high ninth straight victory.

Quickley had seven points in

the second overtime. Julius Randle had 31 points and nine rebounds for the Knicks.

Jayson Tatum led Boston with 40 points, 11 rebounds and six assists.

Clippers 135, Grizzlies 129: Paul George scored 42 points and led a fourth-quarter comeback to help host Los Angeles beat Memphis, ending a five-game skid.

Kawhi Leonard added 34 points and 10 rebounds to give the Clippers their first win since the All-Star break.

Bucks 117, Wizards 111: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 23 points, had a season-high 13 assists and rebounded his intentionally missed shot with a second left for his fourth triple-double of the season as Milwaukee beat host Washington.

Jevon Carter added 20 points while shooting 6-for-10 from beyond the arc in Milwaukee's victory a night after a home loss to Philadelphia snapped a 16-game win streak.

Pacers 125, Bulls 122: Tyrese Haliburton scored 29 points, including a three-point-

er with 2.7 seconds left, to give visiting Indiana a victory over Chicago.

Haliburton's winning shot occurred after Zach LaVine missed a free throw that would have given the Bulls the lead with 22.6 seconds left.

Trail Blazers 122, Magic 119: Damian Lillard scored eight of his 41 points from the foul line in the final three minutes to lead visiting Portland over Orlando.

Jerami Grant added 20 points, six rebounds and seven assists for the Blazers.

Nets 102, Hornets 86: Mikal Bridges went 9-for-9 in a 19-point first quarter, finishing with 33 to lead host Brooklyn over Charlotte.

Thunder 129, Jazz 119: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 38 points and seven rebounds in his return from a five-game absence and host Oklahoma City led all the way while beating Utah.

Rockets 142, Spurs 110: Jalen Green scored 31 points and host Houston beat San Antonio for the second straight night.

Barbashev, Quick help Knights hold off Canadiens

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Ivan Barbashev scored his first two goals with Vegas and Jonathan Quick got his first victory with the Golden Knights in a 4-3 win over the Montreal Canadiens on Sunday.

Shea Theodore and Reilly Smith also scored for Vegas, which got its third straight home win. Quick, acquired from Columbus on Thursday — two days after he was traded from Los Angeles to the Blue Jackets — had 25 saves.

Barbashev is very comfortable right in front of the net and that's where the forward found himself twice with the puck on his stick. He made the most of it.

"I think you'll see a lot more of that," said Vegas coach Bill Casidy. "That's where he goes, that's where he hangs out. He's comfortable there, right out in front of the net. He was ready to use his feet, his stick, whatever is necessary."

Mike Matheson, Alex Belzile and Rafael Harvey-Pinard scored for Montreal, which lost its third straight to finish a four-game trip. Jake Allen had 24 saves.

"I never feel like we're out of it," Montreal coach Martin St. Louis said. "The good thing (today) was we were only down two (after the first period). It could have been way worse. I know we have the type of game

that we can come back."

Kraken 3, Avalanche 2 (OT): Yanni Gourde scored 1:24 into overtime, and visiting Seattle rallied for its fourth straight win.

Brandon Tanev and Alexander Wennberg also scored for Seattle.

Nathan MacKinnon and Denis Malgin had goals for Colorado.

Flyers 3, Red Wings 1: Nicolas Deslauriers, Noah Cates and Scott Laughton scored goals and Carter Hart stopped 24 shots to lead host Philadelphia.

David Perron scored for Detroit.

Devils 5, Coyotes 4 (OT): Nico Hischier scored 23 seconds

into overtime to lift visiting New Jersey.

Jesper Boqvist scored twice, Timo Meier had a goal in his Devils debut and Damon Severson had a goal and an assist as New Jersey extended its point streak to five games (4-0-1) and stayed two points behind first-place Carolina in the Metropolitan Division.

Hurricanes 6, Lightning 0: Teuvo Teravainen had three goals to lead Carolina past Tampa Bay.

Jesper Kotkaniemi had a goal and four assists and recent acquisition Shayne Gostisbehere had a goal and two assists for the Hurricanes, who've won 14 of their past 17 games.

Byron wins at Las Vegas as Hendrick dominates

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — One way or another, a Hendrick Motorsports driver figured to win Sunday's NASCAR Cup Series race at Las Vegas.

Kyle Larson nearly won the Pennzoil 400 in regulation, but a late caution put teammate William Byron in position to take the victory in overtime.

Byron took the lead on the second-to-last lap of OT to put an exclamation mark on a dominant day for Hendrick. The top three drivers were from Hendrick, with Byron, Larson and Alex Bowman pushing their Chevrolets across the finish line in that order.

Bowman won last year's March race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Byron led 176 laps and won for the fifth time in his six Cup seasons.

"I've led a lot of laps in a couple of races, but to be this good with this team is definitely a good sign," Byron said. "It's a different feeling for me having a team around me that can execute that well. That's just a team effort."

Larson appeared headed for victory when when Aric Almirola hit the wall in turn four on lap No. 264, leading to the second caution of the day.

"I feel like I could have eight or 10 more

Cup wins if it wasn't for cautions in the last five laps," Larson said. "I don't remember many of those working out in my favor."

Most of the leaders pitted a lap later, with only Martin Truex Jr. in his Joe Gibbs Racing No. 19 Toyota choosing to stay out. Byron, in the No. 24 Chevy, came out of pit road ahead of Larson and then easily overtook Truex after the restart.

Byron, who started in the first row with Joey Logano, swept both stages for the first time in his career. Truex in 2017 and Kevin Harvick in 2018 also won both stages in Las Vegas and went on to win.

Elliott to begin rehab

Chase Elliott, the 2020 Cup Series champion, will begin physical therapy Monday, his team owner Rick Hendrick told Fox Sports.

Elliott had surgery Friday to repair a fractured tibia, and Hendrick said Elliott has returned to his home in Dawsonville, Ga. Elliott was injured in a snowboarding accident Friday. He and his family own a home in Vail, Colo.

Elliott joked on Twitter "that the formal request I submitted for a slight edit to the March section of my script was indeed... declined."

"In all seriousness, the support I've re-

ceived over the last couple of days is far greater than I deserve," he posted in a follow-up tweet. "I want to thank everyone who has lended it over in any form!"

Josh Berry took Elliott's seat in the No. 9 Chevy and finished 29th. Hendrick general manager Jeff Andrews said a decision would be made on who drives that car next weekend at Phoenix.

Defending champ hits wall

Logano, the defending Cup champion who won the Las Vegas race in October, hit the wall in in turn four on lap No. 183, ending his day. He was running three-wide with Brad Keselowski in the middle and Kyle Busch on the apron when Logano bumped into Keselowski, sending his Team Penske No. 22 Ford into the wall.

"I'm sure (Keselowski) didn't mean to do it," Logano said. "What are you going to do, right? We got fenced."

It was a tough day all around for Logano, who was running 15th after starting on the pole.

"Considering how we've been here in the past, you kind of expect it a little bit more performance today than what we had," Logano said. "Just off on overall speed. We had the balance somewhat close, just not fast."

Ericsson wins rough IndyCar season-opening race

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Jack Harvey was taken to a hospital. Helio Castroneves needed X-rays. Two cars went airborne, the leaders crashed each other and the Andretti Autosport fleet was eliminated.

Indianapolis 500 winner Marcus Ericsson, meanwhile, won the IndyCar season-opening race.

Ericsson outlasted the carnage on the streets of St. Petersburg for a surprise victory for Chip Ganassi Racing on a swampy Sunday in Florida. It was the fourth career IndyCar victory for the Swedish former Formula One driver.

"I think people forget us in some conversations when they talk about the championship," Ericsson said. "We're here to win. We won the 500. We were leading the championship for a long time. We're here to win."

It was supposed to be an Andretti car in Victory Lane, at least based on the speed the team showed all weekend. Romain

Grosjean and Colton Herta started on the front row, but things began to unravel right at the start.

A seven-car accident on the first lap knocked five cars out of the race, including Andretti driver Devlin DeFrancesco, who was sent airborne when rookie Ben Pederesen slammed into his stopped car. Castroneves, a four-time Indianapolis 500 winner, limped away from the crash while his Meyer Shank Racing teammate Simon Pagenaud clutched his hand.

Castroneves left IndyCar's new mobile medical care center with an ice pack on his right hand, and a clean X-ray taken on his right knee. Pagenaud said his finger was bruised but he was fine.

Harvey wasn't so lucky and was briefly seen at a local hospital after Kyle Kirkwood became the second Andretti driver to go airborne and sailed directly over Harvey's head. Rinus VeeKay had slid into a tire barrier, Harvey ran into the back of VeeKay and Kirkwood launched over both cars.

"It was a pretty disappointing way for our race to go there," Harvey said later through his team, Rahal Letterman Lanigan. "I really couldn't avoid Rinus and then just had a little bit of pain in both wrists when I was trying to get out of the car. Physically, I'd say it was a tough race but I felt great."

Ericsson, meanwhile, passed Pato O'Ward for the win with three laps remaining when O'Ward suffered a brief loss of power. O'Ward pounded his fist in disgust as Ericsson sailed past for the win for Honda.

O'Ward was second in a Chevrolet for McLaren.

"Just very annoying to give it away like that," O'Ward said. "The team can't have this happen. We just got 10 points thrown away. We'll have a look at all the data and make sure that doesn't happen."

Ericsson had no problem winning that way.

"That's racing," he said.