

Former generals rue Afghanistan exit

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The top two generals who oversaw the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 said Tuesday that the chaotic evacuation, which resulted in the deaths of 13 service members, was ordered too late.

Retired Gens. Mark A. Milley and Kenneth “Frank” McKenzie blamed delayed decision-making by the State Department for the rushed and violent airlift out of Kabul’s airport as the Taliban took over the country.

“The fundamental mistake, fundamental flaw was the timing of the State Department’s call of the [noncombatant evacuation operation], I think that was too slow and too late,” said Milley, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “There’s a lot of other mistakes that are made along the way ... but I think that was key, I think that was fundamental.”

The former military leaders shared their assessments with the House Foreign Relations Committee as Republicans continued their scrutiny of the drawdown of U.S. forces at the end of a 20-year war in Afghanistan.

“I will not rest until I get to the bottom of this tragedy,” said Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Tex-

as, the committee chairman. “The American people deserve answers, and I intend to deliver.”

Milley and McKenzie offered testimony that largely echoed previous appearances they made before Congress while still in uniform.

They reiterated that they had opposed the full removal of U.S. troops but said the outcome of the withdrawal, which was marked by scenes of desperate Afghans clinging to departing planes, was ultimately the culmination of many decisions over many years of war.

Both said they wanted to appear before the committee to help the families of the fallen better understand the circumstances of the deadly exit.

Nearly 2,500 American service members died in Afghanistan, including 13 who were killed on Aug. 26, 2021, when a suicide bomber affiliated with Islamic State detonated a bomb at the airport’s Abbey Gate entrance. The families of several troops who died that day attended the hearing Tuesday.

“We owe them answers, and I am committed to assist in the effort to get them answers,” Milley said. “But we should also not be under

any illusion. We’re not going to get all the answers here today. It’s a process, it’s going to take a considerable length of time.”

The military recently completed an additional review of the bombing, interviewing troops who were not questioned during the original Abbey Gate investigation. Marine Sgt. Tyler Vargas-Andrews told lawmakers in public testimony last year that he spotted the suicide bomber responsible for the attack hours before the blast.

McKenzie said he alone bore full military responsibility for what happened at Abbey Gate as the then-commander of U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations across the Middle East. But he also spoke at length about the frustration he felt with the State Department’s policies and actions.

“As you are aware, the decision to begin a [noncombatant evacuation operation] rests with the Department of State, not the Department of Defense,” McKenzie said.

“But we could do nothing, nothing to commence the operation — the evacuation — until a [noncombatant evacuation operation] was declared.”

US military eyes new port on small Philippine island

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

American military personnel will visit a Philippine island near Taiwan next month to discuss building a new, U.S.-funded port, according to Philippine officials.

The new port, at Basco on the island of Batan, would be 100 miles north of the Philippines’ main island of Luzon and 120 miles south of Taiwan.

It could be used in times of crisis, including disaster response, Commodore Roy Vincent Trinidad, a Philippine navy spokesman, told journalists at a briefing March 12, the Philippine Inquirer reported the following day.

“The Philippine Navy and the Armed Forces are always preparing for any eventuality across the spectrum of conflict from peace to crisis to war-time,” he said, according to the newspaper.

Batan, part of Batanes Province, is next to the Bashi Channel, which separates the Philippines from Taiwan and links the Western Pacific to the South China Sea, where Beijing has territorial disputes with many of its neighbors.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has stated his intent to reunite the self-governing and democratic island of Taiwan with mainland China, by force if necessary.

The U.S. Army plans to visit the island in April to discuss the port project, Batanes Gov. Marilou Cayco said March 9, the Inquirer reported. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command is preparing a response to questions about the project, spokeswoman Kira Wurst told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday evening.

U.S. soldiers and Marines and Filipino troops air assaulted onto Batan during last year’s annual Balikatan exercise.

Philippine Army Col. Michael Logico, executive agent for this year’s drills, said organizers are looking at sending troops to the island again, according to a March 5 release by

the state-run Philippine News Agency. Balikatan is scheduled April 22 to May 8.

The Batan port project is a response to Chinese threats, said Grant Newsham, a retired Marine colonel and senior researcher with the Japan Forum for Strategic Studies in Tokyo.

“It is true of course that improved port facilities in the Batanes islands do help the local economy and are also useful in responding to natural disasters (i.e. typhoons) that blow through this area frequently,” he said by email Wednesday. “But at the end of the day, the interest being shown to this part of the Philippines is driven by the [Chinese] aggression.”

Biden, Trump tally wins as they head toward rematch

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — As Joe Biden and Donald Trump moved closer to a November rematch, primary voters around the country on Tuesday urged their favored candidate to keep up the fight and worried about what might happen if their side loses this fall.

There was little suspense about Tuesday's results as both candidates are already their parties' presumptive nominees. Trump easily won Republican primaries in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Kansas and Ohio.

Biden did the same except in Florida, where Democrats had canceled their primary and opted to award all 224 of their delegates to Biden.

Instead, the primaries and key downballot races became a reflection of the national political mood.

With many Americans unenthusiastic about 2024's choice for the White House, both Biden and Trump's campaigns are working to fire up their bases by tearing into each other and warning of the perils of the opponent.

Those who did turn out to vote Tuesday seemed to hear that.

Pat Shackelford, an 84-year-old caregiver in Mesa, Ariz., said she voted for Trump in Arizona's primary to send the former president a message.

"I wanted to encourage him that the fight has been worthwhile, that more of us are behind him than maybe the media tells you," Shackelford

said.

Jamie and Cassandra Neal, sisters who both live in Phoenix, said they were unenthusiastic Biden supporters until they saw the vigor the president brought to his State of the Union speech. It fired them up for the coming election.

"Beforehand it was like, 'Well, he's the only decent one there,'" said Cassandra Neal, 42. "After his address it was like, 'OK, let's do it!'"

Jamie Neal, 45, said Biden had been "way too nice" before and needed to match Trump, whom she described as "vicious."

"I hate to say it, sometimes you need to equal the lowness to get the person out," she said. "Sometimes you have to fight fire with fire."

Trump and Biden have for weeks been focused on the general election, aiming their campaigns lately on states that could be competitive in November rather than merely those holding primaries.

Trump, a Florida voter, cast his ballot at a recreation center in Palm Beach on Tuesday and told reporters, "I voted for Donald Trump."

Trump and Biden are running on their records in office and casting the other as a threat to America.

Trump, 77, portrays the 81-year-old Biden as mentally unfit. The president has described his Republican rival as a threat to democracy after his attempt to overturn the 2020 election results and his praise of foreign strongmen.

Trump favorites Moreno, Merrin win Ohio primary

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Things went former President Donald Trump's way on Tuesday in a pair of high-profile elections in Ohio that could determine Republicans' chances of picking up critical seats this fall and expanding their power in Washington.

In the bruising and expensive primary to face Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown this fall, voters chose Trump-backed Cleveland businessman Bernie Moreno over state Sen. Matt Dolan and Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose. In northwest Ohio, state Rep. Derek Merrin prevailed over former state Rep. Craig Riedel a day after Trump endorsed him. Merrin

will face longtime U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur in November's general election.

Brown and Kaptur are considered among the year's most vulnerable Democrats, amid Ohio's tack to the political right in recent years. With Democrats holding a narrow voting majority in the Senate and Republicans maintaining a thin margin in the U.S. House, both races have already drawn outsized attention from national party leaders.

Moreno used his acceptance speech in Cleveland to shower praise on Trump, as well as to commend Dolan and LaRose on campaigns well run. He called on the party to unify to defeat Brown.

House incumbents fend off challenges in Ill. primary

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Incumbents in competitive U.S. House races around Chicago cruised to victory in Tuesday's primary, while a downstate Republican challenger conceded in a race that focused on an endorsement from President Donald Trump.

Turnout was low, notably in Chicago, where roughly 20% of registered voters cast ballots.

In the 7th District, longtime Rep. Danny Davis won the Democratic primary after a competitive five-way contest.

Davis, who first took office in 1997, faced questions about his fitness for office at age 82. He said those questions are fair but his experience is valuable, particularly for leadership on key committees. He's a member of the House Committee on Ways and Means.

Davis credited his strong support in the district, which in-

cludes downtown Chicago and neighborhoods on the south and west sides, along with some suburbs.

In the 4th District, three-term Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia won the Democratic primary against Chicago Alderman Raymond Lopez.

The congressman, who dominated in funding and endorsements, was facing his first primary challenger since 2018, when he won congressional office.

In the 12th District, former state Sen. Darren Bailey conceded to U.S. Rep. Mike Bost in a competitive Republican primary in southern Illinois, according to Bailey's campaign.

It is Bost's second intraparty challenge in seeking his sixth term in Congress. Bailey, the unsuccessful 2022 GOP nominee for governor, was hoping to unseat the incumbent.

Texas' migrant arrest law on hold after late-night order

Associated Press

McALLEN, Texas — Texas' plans to arrest migrants suspected of entering the U.S. illegally were again on hold Wednesday after setting off uncertainty along the border and anger from Mexico flared during a brief few hours that the law was allowed to take effect.

A late-night order Tuesday from a 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel temporarily put on hold — again — Texas' dramatic state expansion into border enforcement.

Earlier in the day, the U.S. Supreme Court had cleared the way for the strict immigration law, dealing a victory to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott and encouraging GOP lawmakers in other states that are pushing for similar measures.

But later in a 2-1 order, an appeals court panel continued the legal seesaw surrounding the

Texas law, again putting it on pause ahead of oral arguments that were scheduled for Wednesday. It was not clear how quickly the next decision might come.

During the short time the law was in effect Tuesday, Texas authorities did not announce that any arrests had been made or say whether it was being actively enforced. Along the border in Kinney County, Sheriff Brad Coe embraced the arrest powers but said deputies would need probable cause.

"It is unlikely that observers will see an overnight change," said Coe, whose county covers a stretch of border near Del Rio that until recently had been the busiest corridor for illegal crossings but has quieted considerably.

The Supreme Court did not rule on the merits of the law. It instead kicked back to the lower

appeals court a challenge led by the Justice Department, which has argued that Texas is overstepping the federal government's immigration authority.

The latest appeals court order included no explanation from the panel.

But it had the effect of restoring an injunction issued in February by U.S. District Judge David Ezra, who rebuked the law on multiple fronts.

His 114-page opinion brushed off Republicans' claims of an "invasion" along the southern border due to record-high illegal crossings. Ezra, an appointee of former President Ronald Reagan, also warned that the law could hamper U.S. foreign relations.

Under the Texas law, once defendants are in custody on illegal entry charges, they can agree to a judge's order to leave the U.S. or face prosecution.

Republicans push back on diversity program

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A Biden administration plan to promote diversity and equity in workplace apprenticeship programs is facing pushback from Republican attorneys general in two dozen states who assert it amounts to race-based discrimination.

The U.S. Department of Labor contends its proposed rewrite of the National Apprenticeship System rules — the first since 2008 — would modernize and diversify on-the-job-training programs while improving their quality and protecting new workers.

But the proposed rule change has become the latest example of political divisions over perceived fairness and opportunity in educational institutions and workplaces.

The proposal drew a variety of other objections, including from some business groups that contend it would drive up their costs, reduce their flexibility and ultimately decrease participation.

Among other things, the proposal would require at least 2,000 hours of paid-on-the-job training, eliminating an option to finish sooner for workers who prove their competence.

"It's going to discourage apprentices to enroll in these programs," said Ben Brubeck, vice president of regulatory, labor and state affairs for Associated Builders and Contractors, whose chapters provide apprenticeship programs.

More than 640,000 people participate in registered apprenticeship programs approved by the U.S. Department of Labor or a state apprenticeship agency, according to Labor Department statistics.

'Goon Squad' deputies sentenced in torture of Black men in Mississippi

AP/Report for America

JACKSON, Miss. — Michael Corey Jenkins and Eddie Terrell Parker sat on the front row of a packed courtroom Tuesday and watched as a federal judge handed down yearslong sentences to two of the white former Mississippi law enforcement officers who tortured the two Black men last year in a brutal attack that began on the basis of race.

After a neighbor complained about them staying in a white woman's home, the Black men were tortured by people who had sworn an oath to serve and protect them.

Hunter Elward, 31, was sentenced to about 20 years in prison, while Jeffrey Middleton, the

46-year-old leader of the so-called "Goon Squad" that abused the men, was given a 17.5-year prison sentence.

On Wednesday, Daniel Opdyke was sentenced to 17.5 years in federal prison.

The terror began on Jan. 24, 2023, with a racist call for extrajudicial violence when a white person phoned Rankin County Deputy Brett McAlpin and complained that two Black men were staying with a white woman in Braxton. McAlpin told Deputy Christian Dedmon, who texted a group of white deputies so willing to use excessive force they called themselves "The Goon Squad."

The group of six burst into a Rankin County home without a

warrant and assaulted Jenkins and Parker with stun guns, a sex toy and other objects. Elward admitted to shoving a gun into Jenkins' mouth and firing in a "mock execution" that went awry.

Once inside, they handcuffed Jenkins and his friend Parker and poured milk, alcohol and chocolate syrup over their faces. They forced them to strip naked and shower together to conceal the mess. They mocked the victims with racial slurs and shocked them with stun guns.

After Elward shot Jenkins in the mouth, they devised a coverup that included planting drugs and a gun. False charges stood against Jenkins and Parker for months.

Fighting rages around Gaza hospital for 3rd day

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Fighting around Gaza's largest hospital raged for a third day Wednesday as the Israeli military said it had arrested hundreds of Palestinians during its raid at Shifa Hospital.

The Israeli military said forces were still operating in the area of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Wednesday. It says it found rifles, grenades and other weapons inside the hospital.

The military says it has arrested 350 Palestinians in its raid on Gaza's main hospital.

Israel said it raided the hospital because Hamas fighters had regrouped inside and were directing attacks from the compound.

The military says it has killed dozens of militants in the raid, a claim that could not be independently confirmed.

Gaza officials said thousands

of Palestinian patients, medical staff and displaced people were trapped inside the sprawling complex during the raid, although the military said it was allowing passage for anyone who wanted to leave.

The Shifa medical complex had only partially resumed operations after a destructive Israeli raid in November.

The surge in fighting in Gaza City has raised questions about Israel's pledge to destroy Hamas' military capabilities. The group's continued presence comes months after Israel claimed it had defeated Hamas' forces there and taken control of the area.

Earlier in the day, mourners held funeral prayers outside a different hospital for 28 people killed in three separate Israeli airstrikes on urban refugee camps the previous night.

Associated Press footage

showed mourners praying over the bodies, which were wrapped in funeral shrouds, before the bodies were taken away in donkey carts for burial.

Nineteen people, including five women and nine children, were killed when a strike flattened a family home late Tuesday in the urban Nuseirat refugee camp. Another person was killed in a separate strike in the camp. A strike in the nearby Bureij camp killed eight people, including three women.

The dead were brought to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Hospital, the main medical facility in central Gaza. An Associated Press reporter saw the bodies and their names in hospital records.

Nuseirat and Bureij are among several dense, built-up refugee camps in Gaza that date back to 1948, when an estimated 700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes in

what is now Israel during the war surrounding its creation. Refugees and their descendants make up a majority of Gaza's population of 2.3 million.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says he is determined to carry out a Rafah ground offensive, even as tensions between Israel and the United States intensify.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken will travel to Israel this week as part of his sixth urgent mission to the Middle East since the Israel-Hamas war began last October.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has expressed concern over attacking Rafah because some 1.4 million people from across Gaza have crowded into the area. U.N. officials have warned of a massive death toll and the potential collapse of the humanitarian aid effort if troops moved into Rafah.

Russian border area reels from Ukrainian strikes

Associated Press

A Russian border region being pounded by Ukrainian shelling and drones is expanding its closure of schools and colleges amid a major evacuation plan, authorities announced Wednesday, as Kyiv's forces extend their campaign of long-range strikes that aim to put the Kremlin under pressure.

Ukraine lacks ammunition supplies along the 620-mile front line due to a shortfall in promised Western supplies, which is one of the main factors forcing its army to take a more defensive stance. But at the same time, it is attacking oil facilities deep inside Russia and seeking to unnerve Russia's border regions.

Some Belgorod schools near the border will close early ahead of school holidays, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov announced, after Ukraine shelling continued

to cause deaths and injuries among the local population.

Schools in and around the city of Belgorod will close Wednesday through Friday, he said. Also, universities and colleges will switch to remote learning, and clubs and cultural, sports and other educational institutions will stay closed.

The measures were announced a day after the governor unveiled plans to evacuate about 9,000 children from the region and several days after a rubber-stamp presidential election in Russia in which President Vladimir Putin extended his rule in a landslide.

Ukraine's attacks on Russian soil have embarrassed the Kremlin.

Putin vowed Wednesday to provide support for Belgorod civilians who have lost their homes and businesses.

US relaxes emissions rules for 3 years as e-car sales dip

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration this week is expected to announce new automobile emissions standards that relax proposed tailpipe limits for three years but eventually reach the same strict standards set out by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The changes come as sales of zero-tailpipe emissions electric vehicles, which are needed to meet the standards, have begun to slow. The auto industry has cited lower sales growth in objecting to the EPA's preferred standards unveiled last April as part of the most ambitious plan ever to cut planet-warming emissions from passenger vehicles.

The EPA suggested that under its preferred alternative, the industry could meet the limits if 67% of new vehicle sales are electric by 2032.

But during a public comment

period on the standards for 2027 through 2032, the auto industry called the benchmarks unworkable with EV sales slowing as consumers worry about cost, range and a lack of publicly available charging stations.

Three people with knowledge of the standards say the Biden EPA will pick an alternative that slows implementation from 2027 through 2029, but ramps up to reach the level the EPA preferred from 2030 to 2032. The alternative will have other unspecified modifications that help the auto industry meet the standards, one of the people said. The people, two from the auto industry and one from the government, didn't want to be identified because the new standards haven't been made public by the EPA.

The changes appear aimed at addressing strong industry opposition to the accelerated ramp-up of EVs.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Governor vetoes bill that addresses housing crisis

AZ PHOENIX — Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs vetoed a bill Monday that some legislators believed could have helped fix the state's housing crisis.

Known as the Arizona Starter Homes Act, the bill would have prevented state municipalities from requiring homeowners associations, minimum home sizes and certain building setbacks, among many other provisions, the Arizona Republic reported.

"Unfortunately, this expansive bill is a step too far and I know we can strike a better balance," Hobbs, a Democrat, said in a statement. "This is unprecedented legislation that would put Arizonans at the center of a housing reform experiment with unclear outcomes."

State Rep. Analise Ortiz, a Democrat who voted for the legislation introduced by Republican Rep. Leo Biasiucci, said she was "deeply saddened and disappointed" by Hobbs' veto.

Man pleads guilty to murder after killing lover

HI HONOLULU — A man pleaded guilty to murder Monday, about two years after his lover's decomposing body was found encased in concrete in a bathtub in one of Hawaii's most exclusive gated communities.

Juan Tejedor Baron, now 25, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in the death of Gary Ruby, 73. As part of a plea deal, prosecutors won't seek a sentence of life without possibility for parole. Prosecutors will recommend a minimum term of 20

years to the Hawaii Paroling Authority, according to the plea agreement.

According to court documents, Baron killed Ruby, poured cement over this body and planned to fraudulently take ownership of his car and home in Honolulu's Hawaii Loa Ridge neighborhood. Property records showed Ruby purchased the house in 2020 for nearly \$2.2 million.

2 men plead guilty to killing wild burros

CA RIVERSIDE — Two men who used high-powered rifles to kill three wild burros in Southern California's Mojave Desert more than two years ago pleaded guilty on Monday to federal charges related to the shootings, prosecutors said.

The men wore tactical gear including night vision goggles as they targeted the burros in a remote area northeast of Barstow on Nov. 6, 2021, the U.S. Attorney's Office said in a statement.

John Feikema of Yorba Linda, Calif., and Christopher James Arnet of Loveland, Colo., each pleaded guilty to one felony count of possessing an unregistered short-barreled rifle and one misdemeanor count of maliciously causing the death of a burro on public lands, the statement said.

Wild burros are protected under federal law.

Homeless man arrested in fire at Jewish center

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — A South Florida Jewish center suffered severe damage in a weekend ar-

son fire that police believe was set by a mentally ill homeless man who previously confronted the rabbi and others.

Rabbi Chaim Slavaticki said Monday that the man accused of setting the fire sat down in front of his family's car on Friday evening in the alley behind the Las Olas Jewish Center, raised his middle finger and would not let them pass as they arrived for a Shabbat dinner with the community.

Scott Hannaford, 50, was arrested Saturday and charged with arson, Fort Lauderdale police said in a news release.

Hannaford is a homeless man "who appears to suffer from mental illness" and the fire is not believed to be a hate crime, the police statement said. No one was in the building and no injuries were reported.

Lawsuit accuses NYC mayor of sexual assault

NY NEW YORK — New York City Mayor Eric Adams was accused in a lawsuit Monday of sexually assaulting a woman in 1993 and demanding a sexual favor in exchange for his help advancing her career in the police department.

Adams, a Democrat, has vehemently denied the allegations and said he does not remember ever meeting the woman.

According to the suit, the woman was seeking a promotion in the city's Transit Police Department when she sought help from Adams, then a police officer and high-ranking member of the Guardians Association, a fraternal organization that advocates for Black members of law enforcement.

The lawsuit says that he offered to drive her home from work and then drove to a vacant lot, where he offered to help her, but said he "also needed some help." She said that while sitting in the parked car, Adams demanded oral sex.

After she refused, she said he exposed himself and masturbated, according to the lawsuit. Adams then said he had to get back to work, and dropped her at a Manhattan subway station, according to the suit.

Afghan refugee convicted of murder in New Mexico

NM ALBUQUERQUE — An Afghan refugee was found guilty Monday of first-degree murder in one of three fatal shootings that shook Albuquerque's Muslim community during the summer of 2022.

Muhammad Syed faces life in prison for killing 41-year-old Afatab Hussein on July 26, 2022. He also will stand trial in the coming months in the other two slayings.

During the trial, prosecutors presented cellphone data that showed his phone was in the area when the shooting occurred, and a ballistics expert testified that casings and projectiles recovered from the scene had been fired from a rifle that was found hidden under Syed's bed.

Defense attorneys argued that prosecutors had no evidence that Syed was the one who pulled the trigger. They said others who lived in his home could also access his phone, the vehicle and the rifle.

The defense called no witnesses; Syed tearfully declined to testify in his own defense.

— From wire reports

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Ohtani, Dodgers rally to beat Padres in opener

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The Los Angeles Dodgers started their Shohei Ohtani era with a memorable win on a night of firsts.

Ohtani's RBI single capped a four-run eighth-inning rally in his Dodgers debut, and Los Angeles beat the San Diego Padres 5-2 in Wednesday night's opener, Major League Baseball's first game in South Korea.

"Just a good night overall for Shohei," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said. "The bigger picture is significant because you've got such a generational talent that is on your ballclub in a big market in Los Angeles. There's a lot more eyeballs on the Dodgers and on Major League Baseball."

The game turned when a routine grounder went through the webbing of the glove of first baseman Jake Cronenworth as the

go-ahead run scored.

Ohtani went 2-for-5 with an RBI in his first game since leaving the Los Angeles Angels for a record \$700 million, 10-year contract with the Dodgers. A crowd of 15,952 was on hand to watch at the Gocheok Sky Dome.

The two-way star, limited to batting following elbow surgery, also had a mental error that caused the final out of the eighth. He was called out when he passed second base and then failed to retouch the bag while retreating on Freddie Freeman's flyout, causing an inning-ending double play.

A bomb threat did not seem to affect pregame preparations. Police found no explosives and said they acted on a tip that the threat was against Ohtani.

Padres pitchers walked nine and hit a batter, and the Dodgers had seven hits, none for extra bases.

San Diego led 2-1 entering the eighth when Max Muncy started with a walk against Wandy Peralta. Teoscar Hernández, also making his Dodgers debut, singled off Jhony Brito (0-1), among the players the Padres obtained in the trade that sent star Juan Soto to the New York Yankees.

James Outman walked and Kiké Hernández's sacrifice fly tied the score. Adrián Morejón relieved and Gavin Lux hit a chopper to Cronenworth that the two-time All-Star tried to backhand. The ball went through the webbing of the large first baseman's mitt.

"It could have gone through innings before that. It just happened at that situation and it sucks," Cronenworth said. "I thought it was an easy double play."

Hernández came home for a 3-2 lead.

"That's a tough error for Cro,"

Roberts said. "Fortunate break for us. You got to take them when you can get them."

Betts and Ohtani followed with RBI singles.

Betts, Ohtani and Freeman became the first MVPs to hit 1-2-3 in a batting order since Philadelphia's Joe Morgan, Pete Rose and Mike Schmidt during 10 games in 1983. The only other instances were by Cincinnati's Big Red Machine, with Rose, Morgan and George Foster on May 13, 1978, and Rose, Morgan and Johnny Bench on May 5, 1976.

Betts, moved to shortstop this season, combined with Ohtani to go 4-for-9 at the top of the order.

Daniel Hudson (1-0), the third of five Dodgers pitchers, threw a one-hit seventh. Evan Phillips pitched a perfect ninth for the save, finishing a four-hitter that gave the Dodgers their sixth straight win over the Padres in an opener.

Tough draws await US in Olympic basketball groupings

Associated Press

USA Basketball's men's team will see Serbia and South Sudan in two of its three group-stage games at the Paris Olympics, while the U.S. women will open their schedule in a gold-medal-game rematch against Japan in France this summer.

FIBA, the sport's global organizing body, held the draw for the Paris Games in Mies, Switzerland, on Tuesday, slotting the fields for the 12-team basketball tournaments. The women's field is complete; the men's field still has four spots that will go to winners of qualifying tournaments in early July before the Olympics open July 27.

The U.S. men will be coached by Steve Kerr and are seeking a fifth consecutive gold medal, the U.S. women will be coached by Cheryl Reeve and are seeking an eighth consecutive Olympic title. Both are ranked No. 1 in the world, and both programs have been — by far — the dominant force in Olympic basketball since its inception.

The U.S. men open with Serbia on July 28. The U.S. women open with Japan on July 29. Other group-stage games for the U.S. men are July 31 against South Sudan and Aug. 3 against a qualifier. The U.S. women

also play Aug. 1 against Belgium and Aug. 4 against Germany.

"I'm looking forward to the challenge of preparing for and playing in the Olympic tournament," Kerr said. "The excitement continues to build, especially now that we know we will face both Serbia, who finished second at the World Cup last summer, and South Sudan, who we will get to host in London as part of the USA Basketball Showcase."

The American men will play South Sudan in London a few days before arriving in Paris as part of a pre-Olympics series of exhibitions.

But particularly on the men's side, gold for the Americans is no longer assured. The United States didn't medal at the 2019 World Cup in China nor the 2023 World Cup in the Philippines, and although the Americans intend to send a more star-studded roster to the Olympics — LeBron James, Stephen Curry, Joel Embiid and others have said they want to play — that doesn't guarantee anything.

Carmelo Anthony, who was at the draw as a FIBA ambassador, said it's clear that international men's teams "feel confident and

comfortable enough to go out there and compete with the USA."

The U.S. women will have a gold-medal game rematch from the Tokyo Olympics in the group stage. The Americans open their quest for an eighth consecutive gold medal with group-stage games against Belgium, Germany and Japan — the host three years ago that fell to the U.S. 90-75 in the final at Saitama, Japan.

The U.S. also played Belgium in the most recent women's World Cup, winning 87-72 in 2022 in a matchup that was a single-digit game in the second half.

That said, the world's top-ranked team will still be a huge favorite.

"Obviously, you can never go past the U.S. They've proven their dominance and they're at the pinnacle of the game," FIBA ambassador and former Australia star Penny Taylor said. "But what I love to see is teams bringing their unique style of play to the Olympics. I love watching Japan and what they do and what they do so well. China, obviously, has always been competitive. My heart is always with Australia and I love to see them out there and I hope they know past Opals are right there with them."

Wagner holds off Howard, gets 1st win

Associated Press

DAYTON, Ohio — Wagner kicked off March Madness with the first NCAA Tournament win in program history, getting 21 points from Melvin Council Jr. and holding off a late rally by Howard to win 71-68 in the First Four on Tuesday night.

The Northeast Conference champion Seahawks (17-15) advanced as the No. 16 seed in the West Region and will play top seed North Carolina on Thursday.

“To have the first NCAA Tournament victory in school history, it’s huge,” second-year Wagner coach Donald Copeland said. “It’s huge for the school, the program and these guys, man, that have gone through so much, man, to continue to build and continue to write their own season the way they needed to.”

Howard trailed by 17 points early in the second half but went

on a late 14-2 run, closing within 69-68 on Bryce Harris’ layup with 18 seconds left. After Julian Brown hit a pair of free throws for Wagner, Howard attempted three 3-pointers in the last 6 seconds but missed them all.

Brown finished with 15 points for the Seahawks, who made their only previous NCAA Tournament appearance in 2003 — one year before Copeland made the first of his two appearances in the tourney as a player for Seton Hall.

Harris and Seth Towns scored 16 points apiece for Howard (18-16), the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference champion, which was also seeking its first March Madness win. The Bison made it to the tourney for the second straight season under coach Kenny Blakeney, who won a national title as a player for Duke in 1992.

Tahron Allen’s layup with

16:42 left in the first half put Wagner ahead 7-6, and the Seahawks never trailed again. They built a 17-point lead in the first half and equaled that advantage early in the second.

Wagner shot 52.7% overall and 47.1% (8-for-17) from 3-point range while holding Howard to 38.6% from the field.

“We still were able, I think, to get three great looks at the basket,” Blakeney said. “But sometimes the basketball gods are with you and sometimes they’re not.”

Allen and Keyontae Lewis finished with 10 points apiece as all seven Seahawks who entered the game scored. Wagner had only seven players available for all of conference play because of injuries.

Colorado State 67, Virginia 42: Joel Scott had 23 points and 11 rebounds as the Rams won an NCAA Tournament game for the first time in 11 years, blow-

ing out Virginia 67-42 in the First Four.

Nique Clifford scored 17 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for Colorado State (25-10), which advances as a No. 10 seed to play seventh-seeded Texas on Thursday.

Reece Beekman had 15 points on 4-for-16 shooting for Virginia, which hasn’t won an NCAA Tournament game since it won the national title in 2019.

The Cavaliers’ ugly performance ignited more debate about whether they should have made the tournament field. Virginia finished third in the Atlantic Coast Conference but had just two Quad 1 wins and struggled offensively all season.

Colorado State dominated the boards and the Cavaliers couldn’t keep up, shooting 25% for the game. The Rams shot 55%, out-rebounded the Cavaliers 43-24 and scored 36 points in the paint.

Purdue’s Edey unanimous again for All-America team

Associated Press

For the second straight year, Purdue’s Zach Edey is the unanimous headliner for The Associated Press men’s college basketball All-America team.

The 7-foot-4, 300-pound senior topped all 62 ballots from AP Top 25 poll voters in results released Tuesday. The reigning AP national player of the year claimed all 58 votes last year.

Tennessee’s Dalton Knecht and North Carolina’s RJ Davis joined Edey (310 points) in a clear top trio. Knecht (298) was a first-team pick on 56 ballots, Davis (296) on 55 and both appeared among the top 10 players on every ballot.

Houston’s Jamal Sheard and Tristen Newton of reigning NCAA champion Connecticut rounded out the first team.

Edey leads the country in scoring at 24.4 points and ranks

third in rebounding (11.7). Named the AP’s Big Ten player of the year for a second straight time, Edey has the chance to be the first player to repeat as AP national player of the year since another 7-4 star: Virginia’s Ralph Sampson in 1981, 1982 and 1983.

Edey became Purdue’s career scoring leader during the Big Ten Tournament.

“The thing here is, at the end of the day, he won’t take credit for himself,” teammate Braden Smith said. “He’ll always point to us and say he got here because of us and we were helping him. Awesome accomplishment for him.”

Knecht, a 6-foot-6 transfer from Northern Colorado, is the AP’s Southeastern Conference player of the year. He is only the fourth Volunteer to earn first-team honors, joining Grant Wil-

liams (2019), Dale Ellis (1983) and Bernard King (1977) after averaging 21.1 points to help the Volunteers win their first SEC regular-season crown since 2008.

“His journey is one that you kind of read about, like fairytale type deals,” Vols associate head coach Justin Gainey said. “Just to see him get to this point and achieve what he’s achieved, it’s amazing. But it goes to his hard work, his work ethic, his mindset, his confidence and belief in himself.”

Davis, a 6-foot guard, was named the AP player of the year for the ACC after averaging a league-best 21.4 points.

“RJ has been our closer, and in (close games) it’s a huge luxury to know you can put the ball in our guard’s hands and he’ll either make the right shot or make the right play,” big man

Armando Bacot said of Davis during the ACC Tournament.

Sheard, a 6-foot-1 senior, has been the floor leader for a Houston team that won the Big 12 regular-season crown in its first year in the rugged league. The honor for Sheard, the AP player of the year in the Big 12, follows the Cougars having a first-team selection last year with guard Marcus Sasser.

Newton, a 6-foot-5 graduate, has elevated his game to give UConn the look of a team that could become the first repeat champion since Florida in 2006 and 2007. With the departures of Final Four most outstanding player Adama Sanogo and Jordan Hawkins, Newton increased his scoring from 10.1 points last year to 15.2 points on the way to becoming the AP’s player of the year in the Big East for the league champion.

Magic beat Hornets to secure play-in spot

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Cole Anthony scored 17 of his 21 points in the second quarter and the Orlando Magic routed the Charlotte Hornets 112-92 on Tuesday night to clinch at least a play-in berth in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

Jalen Suggs survived a couple of physical confrontations in the second period to finish the game with 16 points, six assists and three steals. Paolo Banchero added 13 points and five assists for the Magic, who led 67-32 at halftime.

Orlando (41-28) is fifth in the East and can't be caught by 11th-place Brooklyn with 13 games left in the season. The Magic have secured only their second

non-losing season since 2011-12. They went 42-40 in 2018-19.

The Magic have won 12 of their last 15 games, but their last 10 wins have come against losing teams. Their next four opponents, all at home, have winning records.

The Hornets, who have lost 10 of 12, were led by two rookies: Brandon Miller with 21 points and Vasilije Micic with 20.

Rockets 137, Wizards 114: Jason Green tied a career high with 42 points, and visiting Houston closed the third quarter against Washington on a 25-6 run en route to its sixth straight victory.

The Rockets are now just 2½ games behind Golden State for the final play-in spot in the

Western Conference. Amen Thompson scored 25 points for Houston, and Fred VanVleet had seven points and 11 assists.

Pelicans 104, Nets 91: Zion Williamson scored 28 points and wowed the Barclays Center crowd with a high-flying alley-oop dunk, and visiting New Orleans beat Brooklyn.

CJ McCollum added 16 points, Larry Nance Jr. had 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Brandon Ingram and Herb Jones each finished with 11 points for the Pelicans, who opened a four-game road swing with their third straight win and seventh in eight games. New Orleans is fifth in the Western Conference.

Mavericks 113, Spurs 107:

Kyrie Irving scored 28 points, Luka Doncic had 18 points and 16 assists, and visiting Dallas held off San Antonio.

Dallas (40-29) trails Sacramento (39-28) for sixth place in the Western Conference and the final automatic playoff berth.

Nuggets 115, Timberwolves 112: Nikola Jokic had 35 points and 16 rebounds and Michael Porter Jr. scored 13 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter as visiting Denver fended off undermanned and undersized Minnesota.

The Nuggets (48-21) moved within percentage points of idle Oklahoma City (47-20) for the Western Conference lead. The Timberwolves (47-22) dropped one game back into third place.

Kane's OT goal gives Red Wings win over Blue Jackets

Associated Press

DETROIT — Patrick Kane scored 48 seconds into overtime as the Detroit Red Wings rallied to beat the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-3 on Tuesday night.

Kane scored from the left circle after Lucas Raymond tied the game with his second goal with 12.6 seconds remaining in regulation.

"That's an elite, elite playmaker that does great stuff at key times," Blue Jackets coach Pascal Vincent said. "His goal in overtime, I'm not sure there's enough space for a puck to get in and he finds a way to get it in."

Raymond has seven goals in the last five games, giving him a career-high 24 goals for the season.

Moritz Seider had the other goal for Detroit, which had lost eight of its previous nine games. James Reimer made 32 saves.

Zach Werenski had a goal and two assists for the Blue Jackets. Kirill Marchenko and Alexandre Texier also scored for Columbus while Daniil Tarasov made 23 saves.

Flyers 4, Maple Leafs 3: Owen Tippett scored 19 seconds into the game and added an assist, and Morgan Frost had a goal and an assist as host Philadelphia beat Toronto.

Travis Sanheim and Scott Laughton also scored for the Flyers, who played without captain Sean Couturier, who was a healthy scratch for the first time in his 13-year career. Samuel Ersson, who was pulled in two of his

previous three starts, made 27 saves, including a stop of Bobby McCann on a short-handed breakaway in the second period.

Jets 4, Rangers 2: Mark Scheifele scored three goals, Connor Hellebuyck made 38 saves and visiting Winnipeg beat New York.

Kyle Connor also scored for the Jets, who have won three straight and four of their last five. Winnipeg is 14-5-0 since Feb. 8 and 19-5-4 against the Eastern Conference this season. Hellebuyck improved to 16-4-2 against the East this season and is 32-15-3 overall.

Avalanche 4, Blues 3: Mikko Rantanen scored three goals to lead surging Colorado to a victory over host St. Louis.

Casey Mittelstadt also scored for the Avalanche, who have won four straight on their current road trip and their seventh straight overall. Colorado has outscored its opponents 31-13 during the streak. Colorado's win streak is the longest active run in the NHL. Justus Annunen made 30 saves.

Devils 5, Penguins 2: Jake Allen made 36 saves, and Timo Meier and Dawson Mercer each scored twice to lead host New Jersey to a victory over Pittsburgh.

Bruins 6, Senators 2: David Pastrnak scored two goals less than three minutes apart in the first period and then completed his hat trick in the third to lead host Boston past Ottawa.

Hurricanes 4, Islanders 1: Seth Jarvis scored twice and visiting Carolina raced to a

three-goal lead in the first period on the way to a win over New York.

Predators 8, Sharks 2: Michael McCarron scored two goals, Roman Josi and Filip Forsberg each had a goal and two assists and host Nashville beat San Jose, extending the team's point streak to a franchise record-tying 15 games.

Oilers 3, Canadiens 2 (OT): Connor McDavid scored and set up Leon Draisaitl's game-winning power-play goal at 3:18 of overtime to lead host Edmonton to a victory over Montreal.

Wild 4, Ducks 0: Filip Gustavsson recorded his third shutout this season, Kirill Kaprizov extended his point streak to eight games with the 150th goal of his NHL career and visiting Minnesota beat Anaheim for the second time in six days.

Kings 6, Blackhawks 2: Anze Kopitar had two goals and an assist, Cam Talbot made 22 saves and host Los Angeles defeated Chicago.

Lightning 5, Golden Knights 3: Brayden Point scored two third-period goals and Nikita Kucherov had a four-point night to lift visiting Tampa Bay to a victory over Vegas in a battle of teams fighting for playoff positioning.

Canucks 3, Sabres 2: Elias Pettersson had two goals and an assist as host Vancouver moved atop the Western Conference standings with a win over Buffalo.