

US wants 3 new sites in Greenland

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. is working to expand its military presence in Greenland to three additional areas as it seeks to add locations for special operations and establish permanent access to Arctic waters, the commander of Northern Command said Thursday.

The expansion would take place on defense areas that were created by a 1951 agreement with Denmark, which controls the semiautonomous territory, and allow the U.S. to close vulnerability gaps in an increasingly contested part of the world, according to Air Force Gen. Gregory Guillot.

“The need there is very real,” he said during testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Guillot said he wants to add numerous capabilities: space systems to enable the proposed

Golden Dome missile defense system; the ability to launch fighters and tankers to be “the first line of defense” against cruise missiles that could be launched from the Arctic; and ports for special operations forces and the Navy.

“We’re very well established in Canada and Alaska and having more capability along what I call the 2 o’clock approach would be key,” he said, referring to Greenland’s location on the eastern side of the Arctic.

Pituffik Space Base in the northern part of Greenland, the only U.S. military base on the island, provides a lot of space capability but limited capacity for fighters and tankers, Guillot said.

He described the discussions with Greenland and Denmark as “very productive” and said the 1951 agreement, which allows the U.S. to construct military installations, house troops and op-

erate with broad operational authority within defense areas, is “very favorable to our operations or potential operations in Greenland.”

The negotiations came after President Donald Trump vowed to take over Greenland “the easy way” or “the hard way,” arguing it was vital for American security in the Arctic, where Russia and China are vying for military and commercial dominance.

The threats prompted a flurry of diplomatic activity and sparked fears that the U.S. would invade the territory of a NATO ally. Danish public broadcaster DR reported Thursday that Denmark flew bags of blood to Greenland in preparation for a possible invasion and planned to blow up runways to prevent American military aircraft from landing.

In late January, Trump backed off his demand to control Greenland and announced there

was a “framework of a future deal.”

Guillot told senators Thursday that he has maintained a strong relationship with the Danish military and is seeking “new and improved” ways to work together.

The U.S. included Denmark for the first time in its annual Noble Defender air defense exercise with Canada this year and partnered with Danish forces again for Arctic Edge, a training exercise in locations throughout Alaska and Greenland.

“The cooperation and participation by the Danes in special operations as well as in fighters was outstanding,” Guillot said.

To maintain trust, the U.S. needs to be open and transparent with Denmark, he said, and explore partnerships.

“I want to show that we are a valued partner and we can be trusted and I think we’ve been very successful in that,” Guillot said.

Iran fires missiles at Diego Garcia, defying assumptions

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Iran fired two intermediate-range ballistic missiles at a joint U.S.-U.K. military base in the Indian Ocean, marking the first operational use of a weapon system that potentially puts targets far beyond the Middle East in range, *The Wall Street Journal* reported Friday.

Neither of the missiles hit the strategic Diego Garcia base — a hub for long-range U.S. bombers, warships and submarines — that is some 2,500 miles from Iran.

One missile failed in flight while a U.S. warship fired an in-

terceptor at the other, the *Journal* reported, citing multiple unnamed U.S. officials.

It wasn’t clear on what day the missiles were fired or if the second missile was struck by the interceptor or also failed in flight.

Still, the incident marked Iran’s first operational use of an intermediate-range ballistic missile, which suggests its missiles have a greater range than Tehran has previously acknowledged, the *Journal* reported.

Nawaf Al-Thani, a defense analyst with the Council on International Mediation, said the long-held assumption was that

Iran’s missile range was capped at around 1,200 miles. Moving up to 2,500 miles amounts to a “strategic leap,” he said in a post on X.

“The real story is not whether the missile was intercepted. It is that Iran may have demonstrated reach far beyond what much of the world believed it possessed. ... Major European capitals begin to enter the conversation. Paris comes into range,” Al-Thani added.

Earlier this month, the United Kingdom granted the U.S. authority to conduct defensive operations from its bases after initially balking at the idea.

Weapons with a range of almost 2,500 miles would put major European cities including London and Paris at risk of an attack from Iran.

Still, it’s unclear whether Tehran possesses any more of the intermediate-range ballistic missiles.

“Nobody, and I mean nobody, even guessed” Iran had missiles with that range, said William Alberque, a Europe-based senior fellow at the Pacific Forum. “It means they probably used a modified missile — maybe a prototype,” indicating Tehran still had storage or workshops that could make the alterations.

DOD sets stricter religious limits on beards

By MARC CASTANEDA
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon is tightening regulations governing religious exemptions to military grooming standards, requiring more detailed reviews and stricter documentation across all service branches.

A March 11 memo from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth directs the military to standardize how religious accommodation requests are submitted, reviewed and approved, with an emphasis on consistency across the services.

Under the policy, troops are expected to remain clean-shaven unless granted an exemption on a case-by-case basis for sincerely held religious beliefs.

Applicants must submit detailed documentation demonstrating the sincerity of their be-

liefs and how grooming requirements conflict with their religious practices.

Required materials include a sworn written statement affirming the belief, a description of the belief and its basis, an explanation of how shaving interferes with that belief and supporting evidence, such as statements from religious leaders.

False statements could result in disciplinary action under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Service members whose requests are denied may leave the military, according to the memo.

The guidance follows earlier moves by Hegseth to tighten grooming standards. In September, he ordered an end to permanent medical shaving exemptions and signaled limits on religious waivers that have allowed some troops to wear beards in recent

years.

At a gathering of senior military leaders that month in Quantico, Va., Hegseth criticized what he described as widespread abuse of shaving exemptions.

"No more beardos," he said. "The era of rampant and ridiculous shaving profiles is done."

The new policy requires unit commanders to evaluate requests for sincerity and assess whether facial hair could interfere with mission requirements or protective equipment. Reviews must include input from immediate supervisors, chaplains and other sources at the commander's discretion.

Requests will be evaluated under the legal standard of "compelling government interest" and "least restrictive means."

Commanders must consider potential impacts on readiness,

including whether facial hair could affect the seal of gas masks or other protective gear, as well as broader safety risks and mission demands.

Army Sgt. Clay Stephens, a medical logistics specialist with the 101st Airborne Division who identifies as a Nordic Pagan, said the new process appears more rigorous than previous policies.

"Now it's more thorough to make sure you are truly sincere," he said by Facebook Messenger on Thursday. "Does it suck for people trying to get one for the first time? Absolutely. Will it stop Soldiers from BSing the system? Absolutely."

Previously approved religious accommodations must be reviewed within 90 days. The policy takes effect immediately, with implementation plans due within 30 days.

US forces strike alleged drug boat, kill 2, in Pacific

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces on Thursday conducted a strike in the eastern Pacific Ocean, the first in nearly two weeks, leaving two dead and one survivor recovered by the Coast Guard.

"Intelligence confirmed the low-profile vessel was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Eastern Pacific and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations," U.S. Southern Command announced. "Following the engagement, US-SOUTHCOM immediately notified [the] U.S. Coast Guard to activate the search and rescue system for the survivors."

All three people aboard the boat initially survived the strike, SOUTHCOM said.

The U.S. Coast Guard coordinated with Maritime Rescue Co-

ordination Center Costa Rica and Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf was diverted from its patrol to comb the site of the attack, the Coast Guard said in a statement. The Bertholf recovered two deceased people and one survivor, who were all transferred to the Costa Rican Coast Guard.

The operation is only the second known instance of suspected drug traffickers surviving an attack and being transferred. An October strike in the Atlantic Ocean left two survivors and two people killed. The survivors were repatriated to Colombia and Ecuador without facing charges in the United States.

President Donald Trump said the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs.

National Guard troops aid Oahu after storm, floods

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Hawaii National Guard activated 195 soldiers and airmen Friday to respond to emergencies arising from a storm that caused massive flooding and a potential dam breach on the island of Oahu, the Guard's commander said Friday evening.

For the second week in a row, a Kona low system settled near the state and brought slashing rain that has caused flooding on Oahu, particularly in the northern and central portions.

A Kona low system reverses the trade winds to the islands, bringing heavy rains to the leeward side of Hawaiian islands that seldom see the brunt of storms.

On Friday, up to 13 inches of rain fell in parts of Oahu.

Gov. Josh Green ordered the evacuation of two North Shore towns, Waialua and Haleiwa, because they were threatened by a breach in the Wahiawa dam in central Oahu that had filled dangerously high from the heavy rain. Hawaii National Guard high-water vehicle teams rescued about 50 residents of the two towns who were stranded by flooding, Maj. Gen. Stephen Logan, adjutant general of the Hawaii Department of Defense, said during a news conference from the governor's office Friday evening.

"This afternoon, three Hawaii National Guard Black Hawk helicopters rescued 32 [children] and 15 adults who were camping during spring break," Logan said.

The helicopters also rescued two dogs that had been trapped by flooding, he said.

Maduro asks federal judge to toss case

Miami Herald

Lawyers for former Venezuelan strongman Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are asking a U.S. federal court to dismiss the criminal case against them, arguing that Washington has violated their constitutional rights by blocking access to funds needed to mount their defense.

In a filing submitted in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, defense attorneys contend that sanctions enforced by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control are preventing the couple from using Venezuelan government funds to pay for their legal representation.

The restrictions, they argue, effectively deny Maduro and Flores their Sixth Amendment right to counsel of their choice and their Fifth Amendment right to due process, as neither has the personal resources to finance their defense.

"The only remedy is dismissal," their attorneys wrote, arguing that forcing the defendants to rely on court-appointed counsel cannot cure what they describe as a constitutional violation.

The filing marks a pivotal moment in a case that U.S. prosecutors have framed as one of the most far-reaching efforts ever to hold a former head of state accountable for alleged involve-

ment in global drug trafficking.

At the center of the prosecution is a sweeping federal indictment that paints a stark picture of Venezuela's upper echelons of power, alleging that for more than two decades the country's leadership turned the machinery of the state into a vehicle for narcotics trafficking.

"For over 25 years," prosecutors wrote, "leaders of Venezuela have abused their positions of public trust...to export tons of cocaine into the United States."

According to the indictment, Maduro and Flores were part of a tight inner circle of political and military figures operating what U.S. officials have long referred

to as the Cartel de los Soles — a network allegedly composed of senior officials who used their positions to facilitate the movement of cocaine through Venezuelan territory.

The charges accuse Maduro, Flores and others of participating in a decadeslong conspiracy involving drug trafficking and narcoterrorism, with cocaine shipments moving from Colombia through Venezuela and onward to the United States via Central America and the Caribbean.

Within that system, prosecutors portray Maduro as being not a peripheral figure but a central architect.

Trump says he's ready to deploy ICE to US airports

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump said he's ready to deploy Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to U.S. airports as soon as Monday if congressional Democrats don't agree to a plan for funding parts of the Department of Homeland Security.

Trump said Saturday in a social media post that the ICE agents would not only assist the Transportation Security Administration in handling normal airport security but added he would direct them to arrest

anyone suspected of immigrating illegally to the U.S.

The spending impasse has left TSA workers without pay for five weeks, prompting some to call in sick and leading to lengthy delays at major U.S. airports during the busy spring break season. Although Democrats have repeatedly sought to fund TSA alone, those efforts have been blocked by Republicans.

Asked about Trump's warning, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said the presi-

dent had an easy solution.

"All he's got to do is tell his folks to vote yes on our bill today which funds TSA right away," Schumer said at the Capitol.

Democrats objected to the idea of ICE agents in airports.

"I think America would be absolutely appalled to see ICE agents roaming through airports, just as they've been breaking down doors at homes, more of the same," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut. "We could solve these issues in an evening if Trump

would simply say yes or get out of the way. Or just go radio silent, rather than throwing thunderbolt threats."

If Trump follows through with the plan, it would mean a new, high-profile role for ICE, even as the administration has sought to downplay immigration arrests after the agency's turbulent and controversial enforcement actions in Minnesota that led to the shooting deaths of two U.S. citizens. Trump last month ordered a pullback from the Minnesota operation.

Ex-FBI Director Mueller, a Vietnam vet, dies at 81

Stars and Stripes

Former FBI director and U.S. Marine Corps veteran Robert Mueller died on Friday at the age of 81, his family said in a Saturday statement reported by The Associated Press.

Mueller was best known to the public for his time leading the FBI from 2001 to 2013 and for acting as special counsel for the Justice Department's investigation into Russian influence in the 2016 presidential election.

But Mueller's lesser-known military service was a formative part of his career.

After graduating from Princeton University in 1966 and then getting a master's degree at New York University, he joined the Marine Corps, where he led a rifle platoon of the Third Marine Division in Vietnam. He served as an officer for three years and would ultimately receive numerous medals, including the Purple Heart, two

Commendation Medals and the Bronze Star.

His long legal career began after he completed his service and enrolled in the University of Virginia Law School. He would go on to take the helm of the FBI a week before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and played a large role in the reshaping of national security policy that followed.

Mueller would later credit his long career in public service to

his time in the military. In a 2011 speech at a Department of Justice Veterans Appreciation Ceremony, Mueller said, "I count my decision to join the military as one of the best decisions I have ever made."

"I consider myself exceptionally lucky to have made it out of Vietnam," he said. "There were many who did not. And perhaps because I did survive, I have always felt compelled to contribute."

Trump, Iran hurl threats as Hormuz crisis builds

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump, in an indication of the pressure he's under to bring down soaring oil prices, said Iran must "fully open, without threat" the Strait of Hormuz. He gave the country 48 hours "from this exact point in time," in a Truth Social post sent at 11:44 p.m. U.K. time on Saturday.

The Iranian military countered that it will target "all energy, information technology and desalination infrastructure belonging to the U.S. and the Israeli regime in the region" if Iran's fuel and energy infrastructure is attacked, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported. Iranian state TV had similar reports.

The rhetoric suggests neither side is willing to back down, with the war — which began with Israeli and U.S. attacks on Iran on Feb. 28 — having already triggered an unprecedented oil and gas supply crisis that is rocking the global economy.

The latest threats follow a week of heavy hits on crucial energy infrastructure in the Middle East, deepening the prospect of longer-term impact on the global economy.

Oil and gas flows are likely to take time to return to normal levels even after the Strait of Hormuz reopens, with many production sites damaged.

The blockages are also causing shortages of fertilizer and

crop nutrients, raising the prospect of critical disruptions to food production.

The United States and Israel on Sunday continued to target sites in Iran, which itself is firing missiles and drones at Israel and Arab Gulf nations.

More than 4,000 people have been killed throughout the region, according to governments and non-government agencies, with more than three-quarters of the fatalities in Iran.

In Lebanon, where Israel has stepped up an offensive against Iran-backed Hezbollah militants, the toll is over 1,000.

Dozens of people have been killed in Israel and various Arab states.

Iran's missile strikes against Israel have picked up in recent days.

On Saturday, about 115 people were injured in the southern cities of Arad and Dimona, which lends its name to a nearby nuclear research facility.

Iranian media said the strike was in retaliation for an attack on its Natanz nuclear facility.

"This is a very difficult evening in the fight for our future," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, adding that he was bolstering rescue teams in the affected areas.

Speaking on Sunday, he called on the leaders of other countries to join the war and said some of them are beginning to show signs they might.

US deploying 2,500 Marines, at least 3 ships to Middle East

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military is deploying up to 2,500 Marines and at least three more ships to the Middle East, according to a Pentagon official.

The move came as President Donald Trump on Friday posted on Truth Social that "we are getting very close to meeting our objectives as we consider winding down our great military efforts in the Middle East."

The deployment includes elements of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, based at Camp Pendleton, near San Diego, and elements of the USS Boxer Amphibious Ready Group, said the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Boxer, a Wasp-class amphibious assault ship, can also carry F-35B Lightning II attack jets with vertical takeoff and

landing capability, along with attack and transport helicopters.

NBC showed the Boxer leaving San Diego Harbor on Thursday. The group also includes the amphibious landing docks USS Portland and USS Comstock, which were already at sea off California.

The deployment was also reported by The Associated Press, Reuters and NBC News.

The move comes after the Pentagon this month ordered the USS Tripoli Amphibious Ready Group and 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit to transit from the Pacific Ocean off Japan to the Middle East. The 31st includes about 2,500 Marines.

Earlier last week, the USS Tripoli and another amphibious assault ship, the USS New Orleans, were spotted underway near Malaysia in publicly available satellite images.

Cuba: Military prepared as US threats multiply

Bloomberg News

A senior Cuban official said the country is preparing for a possible military assault as President Donald Trump has increased economic pressure on the government in Havana and suggested it could be the next U.S. target after Venezuela and Iran.

"Our military is always prepared," Deputy Foreign Minister Carlos Fernandez de Cossio said in an interview that aired Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press." "And in fact it is preparing these days for the possibility of military aggression. We would be naive if, looking at what's happening around the world, we would not do that. But we truly hope that it doesn't occur."

De Cossio declined to specify the military preparations. His comments are in line with Cuba's defiant stance as Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio ratchet up rhetoric against the communist-run leadership.

Since confirming talks with the United States, Cuba's government released a small number of political prisoners and offered to open up its economy to investment from Cubans living abroad. Rubio criticized those offers last week as "not dramatic enough."

De Cossio said that while Cuba "is open for business," political change dictated by the U.S. and discussions about prisoners in Cuban jails are off the table.

"The nature of the Cuban government, the structure of the Cuban government and the members of the Cuban government are not part of the negotiation," he told NBC.

U.S. sanctions aimed at its Cuba's economy have tightened under Trump and now include a de facto fuel blockade, leaving the island squeezed of energy sources, supplies and funding.

A nationwide blackout hit Cuba last week, at least the sixth within about a year. The island reported another complete outage Saturday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman fined \$150K for failing to report wildfire

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Morrison County woman has been fined \$150,000 for failing to report a grass fire that began on her property and erupted into a 2,300-acre wildfire last spring.

The fine is one of the largest issued by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources over a wildfire violation, and far higher than any in recent years. The agency said in a lawsuit filed last week against Elizabeth Young that it is trying to recoup what it spent putting out the fire.

While the blaze did not cause any injuries, it destroyed two outbuildings and spread into the peat of a dry swamp bed, where fire is incredibly difficult to contain. Seventy firefighters spent five days stopping its spread, using 14 engines, two helicopters, four air tankers and a plane.

AI to help judges craft rulings in some cases

CA LOS ANGELES — Judges in one of the nation's largest court systems have started using artificial intelligence, testing a tool that can rapidly distill hundreds of pages of legal motions and use samples of a jurist's writing style to help reach conclusions and even draft tentative rulings.

The program, which launched last month, gave half a dozen Los Angeles County civil court judges access to AI software called Learned Hand. Although it could prove critical in a shorthanded court system that is facing a workload crisis on many fronts, the announcement has also drawn concern from

some members of the county's legal community who fear the technology could create errors and erode public trust in the legal system.

Court officials say judges in the pilot program are "required to review and edit the draft before adopting tentative rulings" generated by Learned Hand.

'19 Kids and Counting' star accused of abuse

FL PANAMA CITY BEACH — Joseph Duggar, who starred on the TLC reality show "19 Kids and Counting," has been arrested over allegations that he molested a 9-year-old girl six years ago during a vacation in Florida, according to authorities.

Duggar was charged with lewd and lascivious molestation of a victim less than 12 years old and lewd and lascivious behavior conducted by a person 18 years or older, the Bay County Sheriff's Office said in a statement. He was taken into custody in Arkansas on Wednesday evening, and he is currently awaiting extradition to Bay County.

The girl, who is now 14, reported the sexual assault Wednesday to authorities in Tontitow, according to a statement from the local police department. She said she was on vacation in 2020 with her family in Panama City Beach when Duggar touched her inappropriately on several occasions.

Planned Parenthood to pay over discrimination

IL CHICAGO — Planned Parenthood of Illinois has agreed to pay \$500,000 following an investigation by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission into allega-

tions that its white employees faced harassment and discrimination, according to the federal agency.

The EEOC investigated charges made by multiple employees and found "reasonable cause to believe Planned Parenthood engaged in unlawful discrimination and harassment against white employees," according to the EEOC.

According to the EEOC's findings, a Planned Parenthood of Illinois manager made "racially harassing statements."

It also required workers to attend DEI-related training "which involved repeated harassing and derogatory statements targeting white employees, including that they 'are White and do not feel racism the same way non-White patients feel,' and that 'white supremacy is exerted at every level of oppression (individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal)," according to the EEOC.

Boston, unions squabble over GLP-1 coverage

MA BOSTON — The Public Employee Committee, which bargains health insurance benefits on behalf of City of Boston unions, is firing back at the Mayor Michelle Wu's administration after its "ultimatum" over dropping GLP-1 weight loss coverage to cut costs.

Elissa Cadilic, PEC co-chair, said a "majority" of city unions considered the city's offer to implement a utilization management system for fiscal year 2027 that would require prior authorization for employees seeking to be prescribed GLP-1 drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy, and opted to go in a different direc-

tion.

The Wu administration, citing the need to cut down on "skyrocketing" health insurance budgetary costs driven by the popular weight loss drugs, was looking to implement utilization management on July 1.

The PEC, after drawing the city's ire by voting down the offer on March 9, said it's willing to agree to the system, if implementation is delayed by six months to Jan. 1.

State investigated for abortion discrimination

MD BALTIMORE — The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is investigating Maryland for potential violations of a federal abortion discrimination law, the department said Thursday.

The investigation will examine whether the state violated the Weldon Amendment, a federal conscience law that prohibits its states or local governments that receive federal funds from discriminating against health care providers who choose not to cover, pay for, refer to, or provide an abortion.

HHS' Office of Civil Rights will carry out the investigation, which is based on information that states are allegedly "coercing" health care providers to act contrary to their conscience regarding abortions, according to the department's announcement. During a press call, an HHS official said the Trump administration launched the investigation after learning that 13 states require state-regulated insurance plans to cover abortion, even with objections on religious or moral grounds.

— From wire reports

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Boozer, top-seeded Duke roll past TCU

Associated Press

GREENVILLE, S.C. — Cameron Boozer shook off a quiet first half to finish with 19 points and No. 1 overall seed Duke shot 61.5% after halftime Saturday to pull away from TCU for an 81-58 win in a physical second-round game at the NCAA Tournament.

The freshman voted a unanimous first-team Associated Press All-American earlier this week had just two points and missed his only shot in the first half. But he scored three times during the 11-0 second-half burst — twice on high-low feeds from fellow big Patrick Ngongba II in his return to the lineup — as the Blue Devils (34-2) finally shook free of the ninth-seeded Horned Frogs (23-12).

That 11-0 run was the capper on a 26-6 surge that spanned nearly nine minutes, with TCU missing 15 of 17 shots after Jayden Pierre's layup tied it at 44-all with 13:56 left.

Micah Robinson scored 18 points for the Horned Frogs, who beat eighth-seeded Ohio State on Xavier Edmonds' basket in the final seconds of the first round. But they couldn't sustain a quality first 25 minutes after taking a 40-38 lead on Robinson's jumper with 16:15 left.

The game had four flagrant fouls on a day that had players repeatedly getting arms tangled and tussling through contact.

First there was TCU's David Punch taking an elbow on Boozer's first-half drive and coming up with a bloody nose. Punch came to the bench with holding his nose with blood pouring between his fingers, and officials later assessed Boozer with a flagrant-1 foul on review.

Early in the second half, the Horned Frogs' Tanner Toolson was called for a flagrant-1 after a review on Boozer when he went airborne to block his shot, landed on Boozer then grabbed him as he flipped over toward the floor.

And there was a late double-

flagrant foul when Ngongba and Edmonds ended up tangled and fell to the floor.

East

No. 3 Michigan State 77, No. 6 Louisville 69: Coen Carr recorded his first career double-double with 21 points and 10 rebounds, and Jeremy Fears Jr. had 16 assists as the Spartans advanced to the Sweet 16 for the 17th time under coach Tom Izzo, beating the Cardinals in the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Fears added 12 points on 3-for-13 shooting but did the most damage for Michigan State with his precision passing. The country's assists leader, who came in averaging 9.2 per game, became the first Big Ten player with 10 or more assists in each of the first two games of an NCAA tourney.

The third-seeded Spartans will play the winner of Sunday's game between No. 2 seed UConn and No. 7 seed UCLA in the East Region semifinals Friday night in Washington.

Midwest

No. 1 Michigan 95, No. 9 Saint Louis 72: Yaxel Lendeborg punctuated his 25-point outing with a massive dunk in transition, and the Midwest Region's top-seeded Wolverines advanced to the Sweet 16 with a victory over the Billikens.

Morez Johnson Jr. had 15 and eight rebounds for Michigan (33-3), which matched a program record for victories set during its seventh and most recent Final Four appearance in 2018.

Amari McCottry had 14 points and five rebounds for Saint Louis (29-6), which saw its season end after setting a single-season record for wins with its 102-77 first-round win over Georgia.

South

No. 2 Houston 88, No. 10 Texas A&M 57: Emanuel

Sharp scored 18 points, Chris Cenac Jr. had 17 points and nine rebounds, and the Cougars rolled past the Aggies to reach the Sweet 16 for the seventh consecutive year.

Milos Uzan added 15 points for Houston (30-6), the No. 2 seed in the South Region. The Cougars will play in their home city Thursday against No. 3 seed Illinois, and coach Kelvin Sampson's squad — which lost in the national title game to Florida last year — again looks like an opponent nobody wants to play.

Josh Holloway scored 12 points in a reserve role for Texas A&M. The 10th-seeded Aggies (22-12), who beat St. Mary's in the first round, struggled against Houston's aggressive interior defense. The Cougars won the rebounding battle 46-29, had 19 offensive boards and blocked seven shots.

No. 3 Illinois 76, No. 11 VCU 55: Andrej Stojakovic scored 21 points and the Fighting Illini beat the Rams to advance to the Sweet 16 for the second time in three seasons under coach Brad Underwood.

Tomislav Ivisic had 14 points and 11 rebounds and Keaton Wagler chipped in with 14 points for Illinois (26-8), which advanced to face South Region No. 2 seed Houston.

The Illini, who had a huge height advantage, held VCU to 35% shooting and outrebounded the Rams 45-29. Illinois blocked five shots.

No. 4 Nebraska 74, No. 5 Vanderbilt 72: Braden Frager made a driving layup with 2.2 seconds left, and the Cornhuskers advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time, outlasting the Commodores in a scintillating game when Tyler Tanner's heave from beyond half court rimmed out at the buzzer.

Frager finished with 15 points and Pryce Sandfort also scored 15 for Nebraska (28-6), which had never won a March Madness game until beating Troy

two days ago. The Huskers advance to the South Region semifinals in Houston, where they will face either top-seeded Florida or ninth-seeded Iowa on Thursday.

Tanner scored 27 points and Tyler Nickel added 16 for Vanderbilt (25-9), which was trying to reach the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2007.

West

No. 3 Arkansas 94, No. 12 High Point 88: Darius Acuff Jr. had 36 points and six assists to help the Razorbacks survive a scare from the Panthers with a victory.

Arkansas (28-8) will face the winner of Sunday's matchup between top-seeded Arizona and No. 9 seed Utah State on Thursday in the Sweet 16 in San Jose, Calif.

Two of the highest-scoring teams in the nation combined on a back-and-forth affair that featured 15 lead changes and six ties, before the Razorbacks (28-8) had just enough late to send coach John Calipari to his 17th Sweet 16.

No. 11 Texas 74, No. 3 Gonzaga 68: Jordan Pope and Matas Vokieaitis each scored 17 points, Camden Heide hit a game-sealing 3-pointer and the Longhorns became the first team in five years to go from the NCAA Tournament's First Four to the Sweet 16, beating the Bulldogs.

First-year coach Sean Miller's Texas (21-14), which lost five of six entering the tournament and looked underwhelming in their First Four win over N.C. State, will face either No. 2 seed Purdue or No. 7 seed Miami on Thursday in the West Region semifinals San Jose, Calif. The last First Four team to reach the Sweet 16 was UCLA, which made it all the way to the Final Four in 2021.

Graham Ike led Gonzaga (31-4) with 25 points, but the Zags struggled to generate much secondary scoring.

Durant passes Jordan in Rockets' victory

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Kevin Durant scored 27 points to move past Michael Jordan for fifth place on the NBA's career scoring list and Amen Thompson had a tip-in at the buzzer to lift the Houston Rockets to a 123-122 win over the Miami Heat on Saturday night.

Durant's shot for the win bounced off the rim and Thompson tipped it in to give Houston the thrilling victory. Durant has 32,294 points in his career, two more than Jordan.

Durant said he has been inspired by everyone at the top of the scoring list and he hopes to continue to inspire those who come after him. But it's difficult for him to fully embrace what this accomplishment means to his career and legacy right now.

"It's cool, but it's hard to take in when you're still on the journey, when you just care about getting better," he said. "I don't ever want to downplay stuff like that, but I've got to get up and come to work tomorrow."

Miami trailed by eight before using a 9-2 run, with a 3 from Simon Fontecchio, to get within 119-118 with 46.3 seconds to go. Reed Sheppard made a shot in the lane to push the lead to 121-118 with 12.7 seconds left.

Bam Adebayo made two free throws after that before Jabari Smith Jr. was called for goaltending on a layup by Fontecchio to put the Heat on top 122-121 with 5.4 seconds remaining and set up the wild ending. Adebayo had 32 points and tied a career high with 21 rebounds for Miami, which dropped its fourth straight.

The Rockets were up by two when Durant made consecutive 3-pointers to make it 117-109. He moved past Jordan on the second and briefly lifted his arms in triumph after draining the shot.

The Heat were up by 11 early in the fourth before Houston used a 15-0 run, with two 3-pointers from Jabari Smith Jr.

and one each from Sheppard and Aaron Holiday, to take a 106-102 lead with less than seven minutes remaining.

Thunder 132, Wizards 111: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 40 points and visiting Oklahoma City pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat Washington for its 11th straight win, a game during which four players were ejected following a scuffle in the first half.

The Thunder's Jaylin Williams and the Wizards' Justin Champagnie began shoving each other after a basket by the Wizards with 27 seconds left in the second quarter. Several players joined in and the scrum spilled into the stands behind the basket.

In addition to Williams and Champagnie, Ajay Mitchell and Cason Wallace of Oklahoma City each received a technical foul and were ejected.

Hornets 124, Grizzlies 101: LaMelo Ball scored 29 points and finished 7-for-14 from 3-point range to help lift host Charlotte to its third straight victory, over struggling Memphis.

Brandon Miller had 22 points and Moussa Diabate had 14 rebounds and 11 points for the Hornets, who have won five of their last six and are 21-6 since Jan. 22 to make a push for a play-in spot.

GG Jackson scored 19 points and Javon Small added 17 points and seven rebounds for the Grizzlies, who have lost two in a row and 10 of their last 11.

Lakers 105, Magic 104: LeBron James set the NBA record by playing in his 1,612th regular-season game and Luke Kennard made a 3-pointer with 0.6 seconds left to send visiting Los Angeles to a comeback victory over Orlando.

Luka Doncic scored 33 points in the Lakers' ninth straight win, but was called for his 16th technical foul — an automatic one-game suspension by the league if it's not rescinded.

James had 12 points, six rebounds, four assists and three steals on his record-breaking night, passing the mark Robert Parish held for nearly 30 years.

Cavaliers 111, Pelicans 106: Donovan Mitchell scored 27 points and James Harden, held scoreless in the first half, added 20 second-half points to power visiting Cleveland to a comeback victory over New Orleans.

The Cavaliers trailed 88-76 entering the final period, but outscored the Pelicans 35-18 in the fourth — with Harden scoring 13 and Mitchell 12 in the quarter. It was Cleveland's eighth victory in its last nine games against New Orleans, which had its seven-game home winning streak snapped.

Harden made three 3-pointers and a layup in the first five minutes of the fourth quarter to spark an 18-7 run, and the Cavs took the lead for good, 100-99, on a layup by Max Strus, during a 15-7 surge.

Hawks 126, Warriors 110: Dyson Daniels scored a season-high 28 points and CJ McCollum had 23 points as host Atlanta bounced back after having its 11-game win streak snapped with a win over Golden State.

Zaccharie Risacher had 17 points for the Hawks, Mouhamed Gueye had 16 points and 10 rebounds and Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 17. Atlanta shot 54% from the floor to win its 10th straight home game.

De'Anthony Melton had 20 points to lead the Warriors, who have lost eight of their last nine games as they await the return of several injured players.

Spurs 134, Pacers 119: Keldon Johnson and Dylan Harper each scored 24 points and host San Antonio never trailed in a victory over Indiana.

Spurs All-Star Victor Wembanyama had 20 points, eight rebounds, six assists and five blocks. Harper was 9 for 13 from the field in his first NBA start.

Andrew Nembhard scored 25 points and Jarace Walker added 21 for the Pacers, whose franchise-record losing streak reached 16 games. Indiana fell to 15-56 overall and is in last place in the Eastern Conference.

Clippers 138, Mavericks 131 (OT): Darius Garland scored a season-high 41 points, Kawhi Leonard added 34 with a tying bucket late in regulation and visiting Los Angeles beat Dallas in overtime, extending the Mavericks' longest home losing streak in 32 years to 11 games.

Derrick Jones Jr. scored 15 points with a pair of 3-pointers in the extra period, and Garland had 11 assists as the Clippers ended a four-game skid that followed a four-game winning streak.

Naji Marshall scored 28 points for Dallas, which is on its longest skid at the 25-year old American Airlines Center. The Mavs had home losing streaks of 19 and 12 games during the 1993-94 season at since-demolished Reunion Arena.

76ers 126, Jazz 116: VJ Edgcombe had 22 points and 13 rebounds and Quentin Grimes scored 26 points to lead visiting Philadelphia to a victory over Utah.

Trendon Watford had 20 points and nine rebounds, and Adem Bona and Cameron Payne each had 16 points — with Payne adding seven assists — for the 76ers, who won for the fourth time in five games.

Bucks 108, Suns 105: Ryan Rollins had 26 points and 10 rebounds, Kyle Kuzma scored 20 before leaving with an injury and short-handed Milwaukee beat host Phoenix.

Rollins made a tough floater in the lane with 23.8 seconds to push the Bucks up 107-104 and added a free throw with 9.7 seconds left to seal the win. He shot 10-for-19 from the field and also added seven assists.

Stamkos leads Predators past Knights

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Steven Stamkos had two goals and an assist to lead the Nashville Predators to a 4-1 win over the Vegas Golden Knights on Saturday.

Stamkos opened the scoring 40 seconds in and added a power-play goal in the first two minutes of the second period as Nashville raced to an early three-goal lead. Tyson Jost and Ryan O'Reilly also scored for the Predators, who won their third straight and for the fourth time in six games. Justus Annunen made 39 saves and improved to 8-9-2.

With his second goal of the game, the 36-year-old Stamkos broke a tie with Brendan Shanahan and moved into sole possession of seventh place in the NHL with 238 career power-play goals. Phil Esposito is sixth overall with 246 man-advantage goals. Stamkos has 33 goals and 55 points this season.

Shea Theodore scored for Vegas, which lost its third in a row and for the sixth time in eight games. Akira Schmid stopped 16 shots.

The Golden Knights carried the play throughout, outshooting Nashville 40-20. But the Predators made the most of their shots with leads of 3-0 and 4-1 in the second period. Vegas had a 20-4 edge in shots in the first period and a 10-5 advantage in the scoreless third.

Stamkos scored in the opening minute after Ryan O'Reilly won a faceoff and delivered a perfect feed in the slot.

Penguins 5, Jets 4 (SO): Sidney Crosby and Rickard Rakell scored in a shootout and host Pittsburgh beat Winnipeg.

The Penguins, who are jockeying for playoff positioning, earned an extra point in the shootout for the second time this season. Pittsburgh has points in seven of its last eight games and 21 of its last 25.

Arturs Silovs, who made 21

saves, stopped Jonathan Toews and Gustav Nyquist in the shootout.

Erik Karlsson scored two goals and has five in his last three games. Karlsson, who has four straight multi-point games, now has seven goals and 19 points in his last 12 games.

Wild 2, Stars 1 (OT): Vladimir Tarasenko scored 3:06 into overtime and host Minnesota beat Dallas in what could be a first-round playoff preview.

Bobby Brink also scored and Filip Gustavsson made 28 saves for the Wild, improving to 9-2-0 in his past 11 starts.

It is Minnesota's second win in six games, a stretch that included three straight home losses. The Wild are in third place in the Central Division — five points behind the Stars and 14 up on Utah.

Jason Robertson scored and Jake Oettinger stopped 26 shots for Dallas. The Stars moved within three points of Colorado, which clinched a playoff spot on Friday. Dallas is 1-1-1 in its last three games after a 14-0-1 run. The Stars beat the Avalanche 2-1 Wednesday in a shootout.

Bruins 4, Red Wings 2: Defenseman Nikita Zadorov broke a tie at 9:42 of the third period and visiting Boston beat Detroit in an Eastern Conference wild-card showdown.

Jeremy Swayman made 41 saves to help the Bruins move two points ahead of the Red Wings for the first wild-card spot. David Pastrnak, Elias Lindholm and Marat Khuznutdinov also scored for Boston.

Lucas Raymond and Alex DeBrincat scored for Detroit. John Gibson stopped 23 shots.

Lightning 5, Oilers 2: Nikita Kucherov had two goals and two assists to take the NHL scoring lead from Edmonton star Connor McDavid in host Tampa Bay's victory over the Oilers.

Kucherov scored his 39th and 40th goals and had his 77th and 78th assists to push his season points total to 118. McDavid had

his 38th goal to get to 116. Kucherov has 12 points in his last three games and 22 in his last eight.

Anthony Cirelli also scored twice, Jake Guentzel added a goal and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 25 saves for the Lightning. Second in the Atlantic Division, Tampa Bay has won three in a row and four of five.

Sabres 4, Kings 1: Zach Benson had a goal and an assist and visiting Buffalo continued its white-hot play with a win over Los Angeles.

Tage Thompson, Sam Carrick and Rasmus Dahlin also scored for the Sabres, who got their fourth straight win and 12th in the past 13 outings.

Buoyed by significant and vocal support despite being the visitors, Buffalo continued its push for an Atlantic Division title as it is on its way to ending a 14-year playoff drought, the longest in the NHL.

Flyers 4, Sharks 1: Christian Dvorak scored a tiebreaking goal early in the third period and added an assist, Dan Vladar made 24 saves and visiting Philadelphia beat San Jose to complete a three-game West Coast sweep.

Owen Tippett scored in the second period and defenseman Travis Sanheim and Noah Cates added empty-net goals in the final two minutes as the Flyers won their third straight and for the fifth time in six games. They completed a California sweep for the second time in franchise history and extended their road winning streak to seven games.

Dmitry Orlov scored for the Sharks, who lost their fourth in a row and for the seventh time in nine games. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 24 of 26 shots.

Blue Jackets 5, Kraken 2: Host Columbus scored three times in the first period and beat Seattle, extending the Blue Jackets' point streak to 12 games.

Danton Heinen, Damon Se-

erson and Mathieu Olivier scored in the opening frame, and Zach Werenski assisted on all three. Cole Sillinger had a goal and two assists, Kent Johnson added a goal and Elvis Merzlikins made 15 saves as Columbus won its fourth straight.

Kaapo Kakko had a goal and an assist, and Vince Dunn also scored for the Kraken, who have lost three straight and fell two points behind Nashville for the final Western Conference wild-card spot.

Canadiens 7, Islanders 3: Cole Caufield scored three goals to push his season total to 43 and added two assists to help host Montreal beat New York.

Caufield is second in the NHL in goals, two behind Colorado star Nathan MacKinnon.

The Canadiens are third in the Atlantic Division, while the Islanders are a point behind Detroit for the second wild card in the tight Eastern Conference.

Senators 5, Maple Leafs 2: Host Ottawa had a dominant game against its provincial rivals, beating Toronto.

Anthony Stolarz was expected to get the start, but took a puck to the throat during warm-ups and was sent to hospital for precautionary imaging, putting Joseph Woll back in action. Woll had faced 36 shots in a 4-3 overtime loss to Carolina on Friday night.

Blues 3, Canucks 1: Pius Suter and Pavel Buchnevich scored in a 1:19 span in the second period and visiting St. Louis beat NHL-worst Vancouver to end a two-game losing streak.

The Blues are six points behind Nashville for the final wild-card playoff berth in the Western Conference. They are 7-1-2 in their last 10.

Jordan Kyrou scored into an empty net on a power play with 48 seconds left to seal it. Jordan Binnington stopped 14 shots for St. Louis, allowing only defenseman Filip Hronek's third-period goal on a power play.