

As civilians flee, Ukrainian forces stay

The Washington Post

POLTAVKA, Ukraine — There was an air of levity on the firing range as Ukrainian Territorial Defense soldiers took their first breather from the war in weeks. One by one, they took a knee to test their rocket-propelled grenades as watching comrades cracked jokes. Others turned their faces to the sun and enjoyed a moment of calm between explosions.

“You guys don’t have long before you get back out there,” a commander reminded the group. “Rest while you can.”

Almost three months into Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Moscow’s forces are stalled in eastern regions that President Vladimir Putin promised to “liberate.” In the Donbas, which Russia no longer recognizes as part of Ukraine, Moscow’s gains have been limited. To the west near Kharkiv, it has lost territory. Here in the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia, the front lines have almost completely frozen.

“The Russians aren’t winning and the Ukrainians aren’t winning, and we’re at a bit of a stalemate here,” the director of the Penta-

gon’s Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, told the Senate last week.

From their bases in the region’s small villages, Ukrainian and Russian soldiers can barely see one another. They trade artillery fire for days on end in the hope that it will suppress advances. Beneath the arcs of that crossfire, the streets are eerily quiet.

Sitting on the Azov Sea between the Donetsk and Kherson regions, Zaporizhzhia is partly occupied by Russian forces, who are now trying to advance northward. But the front lines have hardened.

“Both sides are digging in, both sides are scrapping it out, both sides are shelling each other and both sides are changing hands in terms of their control over towns and villages and areas every single day,” a senior U.S. defense official told reporters.

Analysts from the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War said Thursday that Ukrainian artillery fire on Russian forces along the western border of the Donetsk region had halted their advances toward Zaporizhzhia city.

That urban center has become a sanctuary

for those fleeing. In recent weeks, thousands of civilians from across the southeast have arrived in bullet-riddled cars and battered old buses at a nondescript parking lot where volunteers register them and provide a hot meal.

“It’s the first time they know they are safe,” said Oleksiy Servitsky, a local official who oversees the process. “This region is the gateway to Ukraine.”

Most arrive from farther south, including from the Russian-occupied cities of Mariupol, Melitopol and Kherson. But others are fleeing active fighting along the Zaporizhzhia front line.

In the neighborhood closest to the field that separated Ukrainian forces from the Russians, a half-dozen members of Ukraine’s Territorial Defense Forces milled around between two houses. Ilya, 21, said he had been a miniaturist before the war, painting toy soldiers. He was dressed in green fatigues now, with the national colors — blue and yellow — on his arm.

“This was never the job I imagined having,” Ilya said, “but we’ll stay here as long as we need to.”

Biden acts to deploy US troops back to Somalia

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Hundreds of U.S. special operations troops will return to Somalia, reversing a decision by former President Donald Trump during the last days of his administration to pull 700 service members from the country, *The New York Times* reported Monday.

The order also grants the Pentagon greater authority to carry out airstrikes in the country against about a dozen leaders of an al-Qaida-aligned militant group, the *Times* reported.

The new Somali mission would be capped at about 450 personnel, said the report.

U.S. forces already in the region will be repositioned, said a

senior defense official who requested anonymity to discuss a decision that has not been formally announced, *The Associated Press* reported. It wasn’t reported when the repositioning would take place.

Citing unidentified administration officials, the *Times* reported that President Joe Biden signed off on the plan in early May. The decision comes in the wake of criticism by the top U.S. general for Africa over the current strategy against the al-Shabab group.

In March, U.S. Africa Command’s Gen. Stephen Townsend told the Senate Armed Services Committee that rotating troops to Somalia on training missions

amounted to “commuting to work.” The plan also “caused new challenges and risks for our troops,” he said.

“I believe my assessment is that it (the strategy) is not effective. ... We are marching in place at best. We may be backsliding,” Townsend said.

For decades, al-Shabab militants have waged a contest for control of Somalia, a country with a weak central government and a long history of disorder.

In recent years, the United States had stepped up its support of Somalia’s army, with expanded training missions and an airstrike campaign against militants.

But following Trump’s order

to pull forces from the country and a sharp reduction in airstrikes by the Biden administration, there have been concerns that militants are gaining ground.

So far in 2022, AFRICOM has announced one airstrike against al-Shabab fighters in Somalia. That took place in February and was the first strike in the country since August 2021.

By comparison, the U.S. conducted 63 strikes against Islamic militants in Somalia in 2020.

With a force estimated at between 5,000 and 7,000 fighters, al-Shabab has more freedom of movement since airstrikes have been scaled back, defense officials have said.

Kim rebukes his officials over their virus response

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — The United States supports international efforts to supply North Korea with COVID-19 vaccines but has no plans to provide any on its own, according to the State Department.

The department on Saturday acknowledged reports of a COVID-19 outbreak in North Korea, the day before the communist regime's leader, Kim Jung Un, reportedly criticized his own officials for mishandling the country's pandemic response.

The North on Monday reported 392,920 cases of an uncharacterized fever, bringing the total caseload since late April to 1,213,550 and the death toll of 50, according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency. At least 564,860 people are "under medical treatment," KCNA reported.

The U.S. strongly supports and encourages "the efforts of U.S. and international aid and health organizations" seeking to curb the spread of COVID-19 in North Korea, said a statement on the State Department's website.

"While the U.S. does not currently have plans to share vaccines with [North Korea], we continue to support international efforts aimed at the provision of critical humani-

tarian aid to the most vulnerable North Koreans," the statement said.

The international COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access plan, or COVAX, determines the allocation for most U.S. vaccine donations, but North Korea has "refused all vaccine donations" from COVAX, according to the State Department.

Kim presided over a Politburo meeting with health officials on Sunday and authorized an "emergency order" to tap into the state reserves of medical aid, KCNA reported Monday.

Kim was said to have rebuked officials for "not properly recognizing the present crisis" and for logistical problems in distributing medical aid for the country's citizens.

Kim "strongly criticized the cabinet and public health sector for their irresponsible work attitude and organizing and executing ability," KCNA reported.

North Korea's reported caseload overshadows that of South Korea, which reported 13,296 new infections Sunday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in a speech before the National Assembly proposed sending medical aid, including vaccines, to the North.

Two-star general is first woman to lead Horn of Africa command

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

An Army two-star general is the first woman to take command of forces at the only permanent American military base in Africa, a milestone in the military's 20-year mission in Djibouti.

Maj. Gen. Jami Shawley, a 1992 graduate of West Point, took over Saturday as head of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, replacing Maj. Gen. William Zanna.

U.S. Africa Command's Gen. Stephen Townsend, who was on hand for the leadership change, said Shawley will be re-

sponsible for coordinating with partners to "maintain pressure on terrorists and other malign actors in this region."

Camp Lemonnier, the U.S. military's main African hub, plays a key role in supporting counterterrorism efforts in neighboring Somalia.

Shawley said a key focus for her mission will be to work with an array of units that "enable us to provide crisis response, to support and protect our troops in Somalia and other locations."

The leadership change comes as the U.S. looks for ways to keep the pressure on Somali militants aligned with al-Qaida.

US and Japanese firefighters hone casualty response

BY JUAN KING
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — As F-16 Fighting Falcons roared overhead for an air-combat exercise, emergency workers worked a simulated aircraft crash at this airlift hub in western Tokyo.

More than 100 firefighters and other first responders from four U.S. military installations and one Japanese fire department converged at Yokota on Wednesday to practice their response to a major aircraft accident.

Airmen and crew from Yokota's fire department and 374th Medical Group joined firefighters from Misawa Air Base, Naval Air Facility Atsugi, Yokosuka Naval Base and their Japanese counterparts from Fussa city in Tokyo.

"It's important if this were to happen in real life," Maj. Christopher Wolff, the 374th Airlift Wing's chief flight safety officer, told Stars and Stripes during the exercise. "As a military aviator, we practice what we do and we're very good at what we do. But mishaps are still a fact of life, and when they do happen, we need to be ready to respond as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Planners laid out the major accident response exercise, or MARE, starting in January; it was the first big exercise of its kind at Yokota since 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic officially arrived, Wolff said.

At the start, firefighters extinguished simulated aircraft and building fires.

First responders created a mass casualty zone where they gathered and treated the injured, part of the routine in this type of mishap, Wolff said.

An emergency operation center, also organized as part of the exercise, provided a central location for communicating with the aircraft's home base, he said.

"This is a really joint and multinational effort," he said. "We can practice our response capabilities and integrate with the local authorities in the event that the worst happened off base."

As firefighters snuffed out flames and the medical group sorted through casualties in the triage area, unit evaluators sized up how well they performed, said Yokota spokesman Staff Sgt. Juan Torres Chardon.

Russia encounters obstacles in Ukraine, globally

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Europe pushed to toughen its response Monday to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, with Sweden joining Finland in deciding to seek NATO membership and European Union officials working to rescue proposed sanctions on Russian oil.

Ukrainian troops repulsed Russia's attempted advances and even rolled back the front lines in places. In recent days, Moscow's forces pulled back from around the northeastern city of Kharkiv after weeks of bombardment.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday thanked his troops who pushed all the way to the Russian border in the Kharkiv region.

"I'm very grateful to you, on behalf of all Ukrainians, on my behalf and on behalf of my family," he said in a video message. "I'm very grateful to

all the fighters like you."

Ukrainian border guards said they defeated a Russian attempt to send sabotage and reconnaissance troops into the Sumy region, some 90 miles northwest of Kharkiv.

And a glimmer of hope emerged for wounded Ukrainian troops trapped in the bombed remains of a giant steel plant, the last stronghold of resistance in the port city of Mariupol. The Russian Defense Ministry announced an agreement for the wounded to leave the steelworks for treatment in a town held by pro-Moscow separatists.

There was no immediate confirmation from the Ukrainian side, and there was no word on whether the wounded would be considered prisoners of war. Nor was it clear how many fighters might be evacuated.

As fighting raged in eastern

Ukraine, the international response to Russia picked up pace. Sweden announced it will seek NATO membership, following a similar decision from its neighbor Finland. That would be a historic shift on the European continent for the two countries, nonaligned for generations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who launched the invasion Feb. 24 in what he said was an effort to check NATO's expansion but is now seeing that strategy backfire, warned that a military buildup on Finnish and Swedish territory "will of course give rise to our reaction in response."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has said the membership process for both could be very quick, although member Turkey has expressed some reservations.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said

joining the 30-member military alliance is her country's best defense in the face of Russian behavior.

"Unfortunately, we have no reason to believe that the trend (of Russia's actions) will reverse in the foreseeable future," she said.

Europe is also working to choke off funding for the Kremlin's war by reducing the billions of dollars it spends on imports of Russian energy.

But a proposed EU embargo faces opposition from a small group of countries dependent on Russian imports, including Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Bulgaria also has reservations.

"We will do our best in order to deblock the situation," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said. "I cannot ensure that it is going to happen because positions are quite strong."

Sweden seeking NATO membership in big shift

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — Sweden on Monday decided to join neighboring Finland in seeking NATO membership, ending more than two centuries of military non-alignment in a historic shift prompted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson warned that the Nordic country would be in a "vulnerable position" during the application period and urged her fellow citizens to brace themselves for the Russian response.

"Russia has said that it will take countermeasures if we join NATO," she said. "We cannot rule out that Sweden will be exposed to, for instance, disinformation and attempts to intimidate and divide us."

Sweden's move came a day af-

ter the governing Social Democratic party endorsed a plan for the country to join the trans-Atlantic alliance, and Finland's government announced it would seek to join NATO as well.

Moscow has repeatedly warned Finland, which shares an 830-mile border with Russia, and Sweden of repercussions should they pursue NATO membership. But Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday seemed to downplay the significance of their move.

Speaking to a Russian-led military alliance of six ex-Soviet states, Putin said Moscow "does not have a problem" with Sweden or Finland as they apply for NATO membership, but that "the expansion of military infrastructure onto this territory will of course give rise to our reaction in response."

McDonald's plans to sell its business in Russia

Associated Press

More than three decades after it became the first American fast food restaurant to open in the Soviet Union, McDonald's said Monday that it has started the process of selling its business in Russia, another symbol of the country's increasing isolation over its war in Ukraine.

The company, which has 850 restaurants in Russia that employ 62,000 people, pointed to the humanitarian crisis caused by the war, saying holding on to its business in Russia "is no longer tenable, nor is it consistent with McDonald's values."

The Chicago-based fast food giant said in early March that it was temporarily closing its stores in Russia but would continue to pay its employees. Without naming a prospective

Russian buyer, McDonald's said Monday that it would seek one to hire its workers and pay them until the sale closes.

CEO Chris Kempczinski said the "dedication and loyalty to McDonald's" of employees and hundreds of Russian suppliers made it a difficult decision to leave.

"However, we have a commitment to our global community and must remain steadfast in our values," Kempczinski said in a statement, "and our commitment to our values means that we can no longer keep the arches shining there."

As it tries to sell its restaurants, McDonald's said it plans to start removing golden arches and other symbols and signs with the company's name. It said it will keep its trademarks in Russia.

Coronavirus deaths reach 1M in US

Associated Press

The U.S. death toll from COVID-19 hit 1 million on Monday, a once-unimaginable figure that only hints at the multitudes of loved ones and friends staggered by grief and frustration.

“It is hard to imagine a million people plucked from this Earth,” said Jennifer Nuzzo, who leads a new pandemic center at the Brown University School of Public Health in Providence, R.I. “It’s still happening and we are letting it happen.”

Some of those left behind have said they cannot return to normal. They replay their loved ones’ voicemail messages, or watch old

videos to see them dance. When other people say they are done with the virus, they bristle with anger or ache in silence.

“‘Normal.’ I hate that word,” said Julie Wallace, 55, of Elyria, Ohio, who lost her husband to COVID-19 in 2020. “All of us never get to go back to normal.”

Three out of every four deaths were people 65 and older. More men died than women. White people made up most of the deaths overall. But Black, Hispanic and Native American people have been roughly twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as their white counterparts.

Most deaths happened in ur-

ban areas, but rural places — where opposition to masks and vaccinations tends to run high — paid a heavy price at times.

The death toll less than 2½ years into the outbreak is based on death certificate data compiled by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Health Statistics. But the real number of lives lost to COVID-19, either directly or indirectly, as a result of the disruption of the health care system in the world’s richest country, is believed to be far higher.

The milestone comes more than three months after the United States reached 900,000 dead.

The pace has slowed since a harrowing winter surge fueled by the omicron variant. The U.S. is averaging about 300 COVID-19 deaths per day, compared with a peak of about 3,400 a day in January 2021.

The largest bell at Washington National Cathedral in the nation’s capital tolled 1,000 times a week ago, once for every 1,000 deaths. President Joe Biden on Thursday ordered flags lowered to half-staff and called each life “an irreplaceable loss.”

“As a nation, we must not grow numb to such sorrow,” he said in a statement. “To heal, we must remember.”

Parishioners subdue gunman in fatal Calif. church attack

Associated Press

LAGUNA WOODS, Calif. — A man opened fire during a lunch reception at a Southern California church, killing one person and wounding five older people before a pastor hit the gunman on the head with a chair and parishioners hog-tied him with electrical cords.

Jerry Chen had just stepped into the kitchen of the church’s fellowship hall around 1:30 p.m. Sunday when he heard the gunshots.

Chen, 72, a longtime member of the Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church, which worships at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, peeked around the corner and saw others screaming, running and ducking under tables.

“I knew someone was shooting,” he said. “I was very, very scared. I ran out the kitchen door to call 911.”

Officials said the shooting ended after the gunman killed one man and wounded five older people before worshippers hog-tied his legs with an electrical cord until deputies arrived. Four of the five people wounded

suffered critical gunshot injuries; their conditions were not immediately available Monday morning.

David Chou, 68, of Las Vegas has been booked on one count of murder and five counts of attempted murder, the Orange County Sheriff’s Department tweeted. Jail records show Chou is being held on \$1 million bail.

On Sunday afternoon, Chen said he was in such a state of shock that he was unable to tell the operator his location when he called 911 from the church’s parking lot.

“I had to ask someone else for the address,” he said.

Orange County Undersheriff Jeff Hallock praised the parishioners’ quick work to detain the gunman.

“That group of churchgoers displayed what we believe is exceptional heroism and bravery in intervening to stop the suspect. They undoubtedly prevented additional injuries and fatalities,” Hallock said. “I think it’s safe to say that had people not intervened, it could have been much worse.”

Alleged Buffalo shooter’s prior threat, hospital stay examined

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The white gunman accused of committing a racist massacre at a Buffalo supermarket made threatening comments that brought police to his high school last spring, but he was never charged with a crime and had no further contact with law enforcement after his release from a hospital, officials said.

The revelation raised questions about whether his encounter with police and the mental health system was yet another missed opportunity to put a potential mass shooter under closer law enforcement scrutiny, get him help or make sure he didn’t have access to deadly firearms.

Authorities said they were investigating the attack on predominantly Black shoppers and workers at the Tops Friendly Market as a potential federal hate crime or act of domestic terrorism. Saturday’s mass violence in Buffalo was the deadliest of a wave of fatal weekend shootings, including at a California church and a Texas flea market.

Payton Gendron, 18, traveled

about 200 miles from his home in Conklin, N.Y., to Buffalo to commit the attack, police said.

Federal authorities were still working to confirm the authenticity of a racist 180-page document, purportedly written by Gendron, that said the assault was intended to terrorize all nonwhite, non-Christian people and get them to leave the country.

Law enforcement officials revealed Sunday that New York State Police troopers had been called to Gendron’s high school last June for a report that the then-17-year-old had made threatening statements.

Gendron had threatened to carry out a shooting at Susquehanna Valley High School in Conklin around graduation, a law enforcement official who spoke on condition of anonymity said. The official was not authorized to speak publicly on the investigation.

Buffalo Police Commissioner Joseph Gramaglia said Gendron had no further contact with law enforcement after a mental health evaluation that put him in a hospital for a day and a half.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Food truck explodes at seafood festival

FL VERO BEACH — A food truck exploded during a seafood festival in Florida, sending one person to the hospital with severe burns, according to authorities.

The Vero Beach police said state and local fire officials are investigating the cause of the explosion. The department posted photos of the scene on Facebook that showed the sides and roof of the truck blown off the vehicle.

One person was flown to a hospital burn unit in Orlando. There were no other injuries and the festival continued.

1758 violin stolen from musician's home

IL CHICAGO — A Chicago musician is hoping for the return of a violin made in 1758 that was stolen from her family's home while they were sleeping.

Minghaun Xu said the instrument was made by a renowned Italian violin-maker and was lent to her by a private sponsor 20 years ago. It was taken along with a newer violin and her son's cello.

The violin, which is insured, has a sentimental value greater than its monetary worth, Xu said.

7 hurt in clash between motorcycle clubs

MA FALL RIVER — Seven people were injured during a melee between rival motorcycle clubs in a Massachusetts city.

Police in Fall River said more

than 50 people were involved in the brawl. Fall River Police Capt. Bardon Castro told WPRI-TV that some of those involved in the fight used weapons, leading to significant injuries, including lacerations, punctures and blunt force trauma.

Four of the victims were taken to Rhode Island Hospital in Providence while three others were taken to Charlton Memorial Hospital in Fall River.

700-acre project for solar energy approved

ME UNITY — Maine's Land Use Planning Commission has approved a 700-acre solar energy project billed as one of the largest in New England.

Commissioners unanimously concluded that the Three Corners Solar Project in Benton, Clinton and Unity Township met regulatory requirements for the site. Further regulatory approvals are needed.

The \$200 million project is one of the biggest in New England, according to Boston-based Longroad Energy. It would produce enough power for 30,000 homes, Longroad said.

Reward for info on endangered wolf death

NC RALEIGH — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is offering a \$5,000 reward for information that leads to a conviction in the shooting death of an endangered red wolf in North Carolina.

The wolf was found in a muddy field in Tyrrell County on April 15, according to the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service. The News & Observer reported it had been shot in the spine and collapsed in the mud, some of which was found in its lungs.

Killing a red wolf is illegal, except under special circumstances.

Bear sought after attack on woman

NJ LAFAYETTE TOWNSHIP — Authorities said a woman was taken to a hospital after she was attacked by a black bear as she walked down a New Jersey road to check her mail.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection said the attack happened on a farm lane in Lafayette Township. Officials said the 34-year-old woman saw two to three bears and was "involved in a physical encounter with one of them."

A neighbor used a car horn to scare the animals off. The woman was taken to a hospital for treatment of injuries to her arm and buttock and was later released.

New Jersey Fish & Wildlife set a trap in the area and said if the bear is caught and confirmed to be the animal involved in the attack, it will be euthanized.

Small plane crashes on bridge, striking SUV

FL MIAMI — A small plane with three people aboard crashed over the weekend on a bridge near Miami, striking an SUV with three occupants, the Federal Aviation Administration reported.

The single-engine Cessna 172

departed from Hollywood-Fort Lauderdale International Airport bound for Key West and soon lost power, the FAA said in a statement.

Two people aboard the plane were taken to a trauma center and three people with non-life threatening injuries were taken to a hospital, according to Miami-Dade Fire Rescue.

Drone video on social media showed the plane crumpled on the Haulover Inlet Bridge with a damaged SUV nearby. A man can be seen scrambling from the plane and being helped by others just before the aircraft became engulfed in flames.

Workers to split \$600K after tip pool ruled illegal

SC CHARLESTON — A restaurant in South Carolina was ordered to pay more than \$600,000 to nearly 100 workers who were forced to share their tips, the U.S. Department of Labor has ruled.

The tip pool at 167 Raw in Charleston was an illegal arrangement that violated the minimum wage laws, the federal agency said in documents obtained by The Post and Courier of Charleston.

The restaurant owners claimed a credit that let them pay tipped workers \$2.13 an hour with the understanding the pooled tips would bring everyone's pay up to at least the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. But taking the tips from waiters made the tip credit invalid and the restaurant was required to pay the higher rate, the Labor Department ruled.

The agency said 92 workers will share in a total of \$624,017.

— The Associated Press



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Mavs crush listless Suns to advance

Associated Press

PHOENIX — It was no surprise when Luka Doncic looked ready for Game 7, calmly draining his first three shots to give the Dallas Mavericks an early lead.

The stunner came over the next two hours: The top-seeded Phoenix Suns had no response.

Doncic scored 35 points, Spencer Dinwiddie added 30 and the Mavericks blitzed the Suns with a 123-90 knockout Sunday night, advancing to the Western Conference finals for the first time since 2011.

“A lot of people said it would be a blowout,” Dallas coach Jason Kidd said with a grin. “They were right.”

Of course, it wasn't the Mavs who were supposed to win on Sunday. The home team won the first six games of the series, but Dallas broke through, dominating in a hostile environment from start to finish. Conversely, it was an embarrassing no-show for playoff-tested Phoenix — which advanced to the NBA Finals last season with a very similar roster.

“We played all season to be in this situation,” Suns guard Chris Paul said. “It didn't work out for us.”

The fourth-seeded Mavericks travel to face Golden State in Game 1 on Wednesday.

“I can't get this smile off my face,” Doncic said. “I'm just really happy. Honestly, I think we deserved this.”

Doncic earned Dallas an early lead, making his first three shots, including two three-pointers. That helped the Mavs push to a 27-17 advantage in the first quarter and a whopping 57-27 cushion at the halftime break.

Doncic and Dinwiddie, who came off the bench, combined to score 48 of Dallas' 57 points. Doncic's 27 points in the first half matched the Suns' team total.

Game 7 drama? Not in the desert.

“It's still kind of shocking,” Dinwiddie said.

Simply put, Phoenix looked overwhelmed by the pressure of a Game 7. The team missed shots it usually makes, made bad passes it usually doesn't make and looked nothing like the team that won an NBA-best 64 games during the regular season.

“That group has a lot of character and integrity and I know how bad they wanted it,” Suns coach Monty Williams said. “We just could not execute tonight. Couldn't make a shot early, that messed with us a little bit and Dallas played their tails off from start to finish.”

By halftime, many Phoenix fans were

booing at the unsightly display.

The series might have been close, but the individual games usually were not. Three of the first six games were decided by at least 20 points and none of the games came down to the final possession.

Game 7 followed a similar pattern, except the team doing all the damage was the road team. The Mavs led this one by 46 points.

Doncic was fantastic, making shots from all over the floor and finishing 12 of 19 from the field, including 6 of 11 on threes. He also got some help: Dinwiddie was stellar in the first half with 21 points on 7-of-10 shooting, including 4 of 5 from three-point range.

They became the eighth pair of teammates to score 30 points in a Game 7, the first since Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant in 2002.

Meanwhile, Phoenix's All-Star backcourt of Paul and Devin Booker was never a factor. The 37-year-old Paul is a 12-time All-Star that has done just about everything possible in the game except win a championship.

After this setback, it's fair to wonder if there will be many more opportunities. Booker finished with 11 points and shot 3 of 14. Paul had 10 points and four assists. The Suns shot just 37.9% from the field.

Williams, Celtics close out Bucks in Game 7

Associated Press

BOSTON — In the fog of the Celtics' Game 5 loss to Milwaukee that dropped his team into a 3-2 series hole, Boston coach Ime Udoka made a prediction.

“It'll make it sweeter when we bounce back,” he said.

Two victories later, the Celtics turned their coach's prophecy into reality.

Grant Williams scored a career-high 27 points and hit seven three-pointers, Jayson Tatum added 23 and Boston set a Game 7 record with 22 three-pointers to eliminate the NBA champion Bucks 109-81 on Sunday in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

The Celtics will face top-seeded Miami beginning Tuesday in a rematch of the 2020 East finals. The Heat beat Boston in six games in that series at Walt Dis-

ney World.

Tatum said his team embraced the “backs against the wall” moments it faced in having to win the final two games after their late collapse in their previous home game.

“As much as it hurt to lose Game 5, I was looking forward to that challenge,” Tatum said. “I believe in myself, I believe in this team. I expected to play the way I did and for us to respond the way we did.”

The Celtics trailed early in Game 7 before outscoring Milwaukee 61-38 in the second half to cruise to the victory. Boston used a whopping 54-point advantage from behind the arc to improve to 25-9 in decisive seventh games.

The Bucks are now 3-9. They went 4-for-33 (12.1%) from the

three-point line. That's the second-worst three-point percentage in a playoff game ever (minimum 30 attempts).

Williams was timid early, missing five of his first seven three-point attempts. It was a pep talk he got from Jaylen Brown during a timeout after Williams passed on an open shot that changed his mindset.

“For me it was like, they're encouraging it, I might as well take advantage,” Williams said. “Each one as time got on got more comfortable.”

Williams finished 7-for-18 behind the arc. The Celtics were 22-for-55.

It helped silence another relentless night from Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo, who had 25 points, 20 rebounds and nine assists. But he was just

3-for-11 in the paint in the second half, including 1-for-6 the fourth quarter.

“Shots that I usually make weren't going in. That's basketball. That's sports,” Antetokounmpo said. “Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose. There's a winner. There's a loser. You've just got to live with it.”

Jrue Holiday added 21 points and eight assists. Brook Lopez finished with 15 points and 10 rebounds.

Boston started the second half on an 11-4 run to open a 59-47 lead.

It was 63-53 when Tatum went to the bench after being whistled for his fourth foul. The Celtics rallied without him, outscoring the Bucks 16-11 the rest of the quarter to take a 79-64 lead to the fourth.

Flames, Gaudreau oust Stars in OT

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Johnny Gaudreau saw the puck bouncing his way, so he raced over, slapped it toward the net — and sent the Calgary Flames to a Game 7 victory.

Gaudreau scored 15:09 into overtime to lift Calgary over the Dallas Stars 3-2 on Sunday night, giving the Flames just their second playoff series win in the last 17 years.

“You dream about stuff like that,” Gaudreau said, “scoring in a Game 7 in overtime.”

Gaudreau got the rebound of Elias Lindholm’s attempt and put a sharp-angled shot over Jake Oettinger, who made 64 saves for Dallas — a franchise record for the most stops in a Game 7.

“You go into overtime with Jake, you know it’s going to take a perfect shot to beat him, and it was a perfect shot,” Stars coach Rick Bowness said. “Johnny made a great shot, right under the bar. You can’t do anything about that.”

Tyler Toffoli and Matthew Tkachuk scored their first goals of the series, and Jacob Markstrom stopped 26 shots and had an assist for Calgary, which will face the Edmonton Oilers in the Western Conference’s semifinal in the first postseason Battle of Alberta since 1991. The series opens Wednesday on the Flames’

home ice.

“I’ve been here for nine years and never had even a sniff of a chance to play them in playoffs, so it’s pretty special,” Gaudreau said. “It’s going to be a lot of fun, good for the province, going to be a lot of fun for them, for us. It’s going to be a pretty cool series.”

Oettinger became the second player in NHL history to have 60 or more saves in a Game 7 since 1955, when shots on goal were first tracked. The New York Islanders’ Kelly Hrudey made 73 saves in a 3-2 win over Washington in four overtimes in 1987.

“He played a hell of a game,” Dallas captain Jamie Benn said. “I haven’t seen too many like that. I mean, if it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t even have been close to overtime or having a chance to win.”

Benn and Vladislav Namestnikov scored for the Stars, who praised the 23-year-old Oettinger for his performance.

“Just keep your head up,” Oettinger said his teammates told him. “Obviously, it’s sad and some of those guys you don’t know if you’re going to play with them ever again, so it’s a really tough pill to swallow.”

Bowness called Oettinger “a franchise goalie, no question.”

Calgary’s Darryl Sutter improved to 8-3 in Game 7s — the most wins by a coach in those situations in NHL history. He has also won each of his last five Game 7 matchups.

“I don’t get too excited about it,” Sutter said. “Not many guys have done and not many get the opportunity to do it. It’s what you coach for, to win series.”

After reaching the Stanley Cup Final in 2004, when Calgary fell in seven games to the Tampa Bay Lightning — 2005 was a lockout year — the Flames didn’t win another playoff series until 2015, when Calgary was knocked out in the second round by Anaheim.

Calgary outshot Dallas 52-23 over three periods, but the score was deadlocked heading into the first overtime period of the series.

“We deserved to win,” Sutter said.

Oettinger stopped Gaudreau on his doorstep near the 11-minute mark of the third, followed by Markstrom turning away Jacob Petersen on a breakthrough.

The Flames tied it at 2 in the second period on Tkachuk’s goal a second after a minor penalty by Dallas expired. Markstrom headmanned the puck to Gaudreau, who dished to Tkachuk for a sharp-angled shot to the top corner at 8:44.

Rangers’ Panarin scores OT clincher against Pens

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Artemi Panarin is such a gifted passer, he looks to set up his teammates for goals. He can shoot, too, and he came through in a prime situation.

Panarin scored a power-play goal 4:46 into overtime and the New York Rangers beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3 Sunday night to advance to the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

“Overall, honestly, they’ve been letting me shoot since the first game,” Panarin said through a translator after he took six shots in Game 7 after totaling 17 in the first six. “Kind of my bad, I haven’t really been making those shots. But maybe I should listen to everyone’s advice and actually get out there and take shots.”

Rangers coach Gerard Gal-

lant said he had a feeling Panarin was going to rise to the occasion in overtime.

“He’s the guy,” Gallant said, “when it was heading into overtime, I said to myself, ‘I know he’s going to score if we score. If we get the winning goal, it’s going to be him.’”

Mika Zibanejad had a goal and two assists, and Chris Kreider and K’Andre Miller also scored for New York, which got its third straight comeback win after trailing 3-1 in the series. Andrew Copp had two assists and Igor Shesterkin stopped 42 shots.

The Rangers are the first team in NHL playoff history to record three consecutive comeback wins in elimination games within the same series.

“It’s a huge win for the team, for the organization,” defenseman Jacob Trouba

said. “A gutsy performance, coming back again. That whole ‘No Quit In New York’ thing is pretty true with this group.”

The Rangers went on a power play 2:55 into overtime when Pittsburgh’s Brock McGinn was called for holding. Late in the advantage, Panarin got the puck on the right side and fired a shot from the right circle past Tristan Jarry.

New York players mobbed Panarin along the boards in the left corner as the sold-out Madison Square Garden crowd went into a frenzy. The Rangers advanced to the second round for the first time since 2017, when they lost to Ottawa.

New York will play Carolina next. The Hurricanes beat the Boston Bruins in Game 7 on Saturday night.

Evan Rodrigues had a goal

and an assist, and Jake Guentzel and Danton Heinen also scored for the Penguins, who were ousted in the first playoff series for the fourth straight year. Jarry returned in goal and had 26 saves in his first game since April 14.

Pittsburgh also had captain Sidney Crosby back after he missed the last game with an upper body injury sustained midway through Game 5.

“Tonight, we’re on the wrong ends of some bounces,” Crosby said. “We played a great game tonight, we played some good hockey throughout the series. We didn’t get that next one tonight that was probably the difference but I think even when we had those leads we still played the right way. Tonight was an example of one game, anything can happen.”

Reds don't allow a hit but lose to Pirates

Associated Press

Cincinnati Reds starter Hunter Greene and reliever Art Warren combined to allow zero hits in a complete game, but it didn't count as a no-hitter — or even a win — because the host Pittsburgh Pirates eked out a run in the bottom of the eighth inning for a 1-0 win Sunday.

Ke'Bryan Hayes' RBI grounder helped the Pirates become the sixth team in big league history since 1901 to win despite not getting any hits. It last happened in 2008 when Jered Weaver and Jose Arredondo of the Angels lost while holding the Dodgers hitless.

By Major League Baseball record-keeping rules, the Reds' accomplishment isn't an official no-hitter because their pitchers didn't go at least nine innings. And in a season in which most everything has gone wrong for Cincinnati, this surely had to be the topper.

Greene (1-6), the prized Reds rookie, struck out nine and was pulled after one-out walks in the eighth to Rodolfo Castro and Michael Perez. Greene threw 118 pitches, the most by any pitcher in the majors this year.

Pirates starter José Quintana held the Reds scoreless through seven innings, giving up three hits while striking out five. Chris Stratton (2-1) pitched around a two-on, one out jam in the eighth. David Bednar worked a clean ninth for his seventh save.

Cardinals 15, Giants 6: Adam Wainwright and Yadier Molina set a major league record for wins by a starting battery as host St. Louis routed San Francisco in a game that ended with veteran slugger Albert Pujols on the mound for the first time in his 21-plus-year career.

Molina homered and drove in four runs, Wainwright pitched six effective innings and the Cardinals roughed up Carlos Rodón (4-2) early. Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan

Arenado each added a two-run homer for St. Louis, which took two of three in the series.

Mariners 8, Mets 7: Prized rookie Julio Rodríguez hit a tying homer as part of a four-hit game, Cal Raleigh added a go-ahead, two-run drive and reliever Diego Castillo struck out Pete Alonso with the bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth to lift Seattle to a win at New York.

The Mets trailed 4-1, then burst ahead in the fourth against Cy Young Award winner Robbie Ray (4-3) when J.D. Davis and Brandon Nimmo became the first teammates in the club's 61-season history to hit two-run triples in the same inning.

Yankees 5, White Sox 1: Nestor Cortes pitched a career-high eight innings and New York took advantage of Michael Kopech's one wild stretch to win at Chicago.

The Yankees managed just two hits: a second-inning single for Isiah Kiner-Falefa and a two-run homer by Joey Gallo in the ninth.

Angels 5, Athletics 1: Shohei Ohtani homered for the second consecutive game, leading Los Angeles to a win at Oakland.

A day after becoming the third Japanese-born player to reach 100 homers in the major leagues, Ohtani belted No. 101. His eighth homer this season was a 425-foot drive deep into the right-field stands off a first-inning sinker from Frankie Montas. Mike Trout, who singled ahead of Ohtani, scored.

Rangers 7, Red Sox 1: Adolis García and Kole Calhoun each hit two home runs, Martin Pérez pitched six strong innings and host Texas beat Boston.

The Rangers trailed 1-0 and didn't have a hit until Calhoun led off the bottom of the fifth with an opposite-field homer into the visitors' bullpen in left-center.

Tigers 5, Orioles 1: Miguel Cabrera blasted his 505th career home run, Tarik Skubal equaled his career high with 11 strikeouts and host Detroit beat Baltimore for its first

series sweep this season.

Cabrera had two hits, scored two runs and knocked in two more for the Tigers. Harold Castro added three hits and two RBIs.

Rays 3, Blue Jays 0: Third baseman Matt Chapman's throwing error allowed Tampa Bay to break a scoreless tie in the sixth inning and beat visiting Toronto.

Brewers 7, Marlins 3: Kolten Wong homered, singled and had three walks to help Milwaukee win at Miami.

Jace Peterson and Rowdy Tellez also homered to back Brandon Woodruff, who limited the Marlins to three runs and five hits in his five-inning outing. Woodruff (4-2) walked two and struck out six.

Astros 8, Nationals 0: Yuli Gurriel went 3-for-4 with a homer, Justin Verlander pitched five scoreless innings and Houston won at Washington.

Jose Altuve, Martin Maldonado and Chas McCormick also homered for the Astros. Gurriel finished the series 8-for-12 with two homers and four RBIs.

Twins 3, Guardians 1: Joe Ryan allowed one run over six innings and was backed by solo homers from Byron Buxton and Gio Urshela as host Minnesota beat Cleveland.

Padres 7, Braves 3 (11): Ha-Seong Kim had a run-scoring double to give visiting San Diego the lead for good in a four-run 11th inning.

Dodgers 5, Phillies 4: Gavin Lux atoned for an early fielding mistake with a walk-off, two-run double in the ninth inning, and host Los Angeles avoided a four-game series sweep.

Royals 8, Rockies 7: Salvador Perez hit a go-ahead, two-run single in the ninth inning and Kansas City recovered from blowing a six-run lead to win at Colorado.

Cubs 3, Diamondbacks 2: Frank Schwindel hit a tiebreaking single in the ninth inning and Chicago won at Arizona.

Kurt Busch passes Larson for 23XI Racing's 2nd win

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Kurt Busch was slowly driving his Jordan Brand-styled ride toward victory lane at Kansas Speedway on Sunday when car owner Denny Hamlin stopped him in his tracks, ducked his head through the window and said: "We did it."

Did they ever.

Busch survived a weary day of

tire attrition, then pinched his way past Kyle Larson for the lead with eight laps to go, before driving away from the reigning NASCAR Cup Series champion to win for the first time at Kansas — and give the up-and-coming 23XI Racing team owned by Hamlin and NBA great Michael Jordan its second win ever.

"That's the most gratifying

part, helping these guys win," Busch said. "It's all about team work. I don't do this alone."

Larson had the dominant car, riding the top line around the mile-and-a-half oval, but Busch was able to put his Toyota just about anywhere he wanted. That paid off when the two were side-by-side with eight to go and Busch squeezed by Larson, who

brushed the wall and lost just enough momentum to surrender the lead — and the win.

Busch pulled his No. 45 car — one of the numbers Jordan wore during his career — to a stop at the start-finish line and climbed out the window before throwing his arms up in triumph, the familiar Jumpman logo splashed across his fire suit.