

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Uvalde grieves, says goodbyes at visitations

Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas — It should have been the first day of a joyous week for Robb Elementary School students — the start of summer break. Instead, the first two of 19 children slain inside a classroom were being remembered at funeral visitations.

The gathering for 10-year-old Amerie Jo Garza was at Hillcrest Memorial Funeral Home on Monday in Uvalde, Texas, directly across from the grade school where the children, along with two teachers, were shot to death last week before the gunman himself was killed. Visitation for another 10-year-old, Maite Rodriguez, was at the town's other funeral home.

Over the next two-and-a-half traumatic weeks, people in the southwestern Texas town will say goodbye to the children and their teachers, one heart-wrenching visitation, funeral and burial after another. As family and friends unleash their grief, investigators will push for answers about how police responded to the May 24 shooting, and lawmakers have said they'll consider what can be done to stem the gun violence permeating the nation.

This week alone, funerals are planned for 11 children and teacher Irma Garcia.

On Monday, some mourners at Amerie's visitation wore lilac or lavender shades of

purple — Amerie's favorites — at the request of her stepfather, Angel Garza. Many carried in flowers, including purple ones.

The little girl who loved to draw had just received a cellphone for her 10th birthday. One of her friends told Angel Garza that Amerie tried to use the phone to call police during the assault on her fourth-grade classroom.

Among the mourners at Amerie's visitation were some of Maite's relatives. Like many people, they were attending both.

Maite's family wore green tie-dye shirts with an illustration showing Maite with angel wings. Before going into the funeral home, they stopped at the ditch to see the metal gate gunman Salvador Ramos crashed a pickup truck into before crossing a field and entering the school.

"How did he walk for so long?" asked Juana Magaña, Maite's aunt.

Hillcrest Memorial itself and the shooting will be forever linked. After Ramos wrecked the truck, two men at the funeral home heard the crash and ran toward the accident scene. Ramos shot at them. He missed and both men made it to safety.

Eliahna "Ellie" Garcia's funeral will be June 6 — the day after she was supposed to turn 10. Her family had been preparing a big birthday bash at her grandmother's house this coming weekend.

Ellie was quiet even around family but loved doing videos and had been already practicing with her older sister a choreography for her quinceañera party — the celebration of a girl's 15th birthday — even though it was five years away, her aunt, Siria Arizmen-di, said.

Funeral directors, embalmers and others from across Texas arrived to help. Jimmy Lucas, president of the Texas Funeral Directors Association, brought a hearse and volunteered to work as a driver, pitch in for services or do whatever he could, he told NBC News.

Gov. Greg Abbott, speaking at a Memorial Day event in Longview, urged Texans to keep Uvalde in their prayers.

"What happened in Uvalde was a horrific act of evil," Abbott said. "And as Texans, we must come together and lift up Uvalde and support them in every way that we possibly can. It is going to take time to heal the devastation that the families there have gone through and are going through. But be assured, we will not relent until Uvalde recovers."

The U.S. Department of Justice announced Sunday a review of the law enforcement response. Police have come under heavy criticism for taking well over an hour to kill Ramos in the adjacent classrooms where he unleashed carnage.

Mayor: Russian forces seize half of key Donbas city

Associated Press

SLOVIANSK, Ukraine — Russian forces in a "frenzied push" have seized half of the eastern Ukrainian city of Sievierodonetsk that is key to Moscow's efforts to quickly complete the capture of the industrial Donbas region, the mayor told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

"The city is essentially being destroyed ruthlessly block by block," Oleksandr Striuk said. He said heavy street fighting continues and artillery bombardments threaten the lives of the estimated 13,000 civilians still sheltering in the ruined city that once was

home to more than 100,000.

It's impossible to track civilian casualties amid the round-the-clock shelling, said the mayor, who believes that more than 1,500 residents have died of various causes since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February. Evacuation efforts from Sievierodonetsk have been halted because of shelling.

"Civilians are dying from direct strikes, from fragmentation wounds and under the rubble of destroyed buildings, since most of the inhabitants are hiding in basements and shelters," Striuk said.

Electricity to the city has been

cut off and people need water, food and medicine, the mayor said: "There are food supplies for several more days, but the issue is how to distribute them."

Sieverodonetsk is important to Russian efforts to capture the Donbas before more Western arms arrive to bolster Ukraine's defense. Moscow-backed separatists already held territory in the region and have been fighting Ukrainian troops for eight years.

Military analysts described the fight for Sievierodonetsk as part of a race against time for the Kremlin. The city, which is 90 miles south of the Russian border,

is in an area that is the last pocket of Ukrainian government control in the Luhansk region.

In his nightly video address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the situation in the Donbas remains "extremely difficult" as Russia has put its army's "maximum combat power" there.

At least three people were killed and six more wounded overnight in a Russian missile strike on the city of Sloviansk, west of Sievierodonetsk, Donetsk regional governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said in a Facebook post on Tuesday morning.

EU bans Russia oil imports to punish Moscow

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — In the most significant effort yet to punish Russia for its war in Ukraine, the European Union agreed to ban the overwhelming majority of Russian oil imports after tense negotiations that tested how far the bloc is willing to go to ostracize Moscow.

From the moment Russia invaded on Feb. 24, the West has sought to make Moscow pay economically for its war. But targeting the lucrative energy sector was seen as a last resort in Europe and has proved hardest since the bloc relies on the country for 25% of its oil and 40% of its natural gas. European countries that are even more heavily dependent on Russia have been es-

pecially reluctant to act.

In a move unthinkable just months ago, EU leaders agreed late Monday to cut around 90% of all Russian oil imports over the next six months. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo called the embargo a “big step forward” on Tuesday morning and Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin hailed it as “a watershed moment.” But both leaders cautioned that Europe would need time to adjust to the impact — and any further bans on Russian energy could only come slowly, if at all.

The deputy head of Russia’s Security Council said Tuesday that energy sanctions against the country were intended to hurt ordi-

nary Russians by making it harder for Moscow to fund social programs.

“They hate us all! The basis for these decisions is hatred for Russia, for Russians and for all its inhabitants,” Dmitry Medvedev, who is also a former president and prime minister, wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia’s permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, appeared to shrug the move off, though, saying Moscow would find other buyers. Still, analyst Simone Tagliapietra said Russia would likely have to sell its oil at a substantial discount. Tagliapietra, an energy expert and research fellow at the Brussels-based think tank

Bruegel, called the embargo “a major blow.”

Matteo Villa, an analyst at the ISPI think tank in Milan, agreed that Russia would take a pretty significant hit now — but cautioned that the move could eventually backfire.

“The risk is that the price of oil in general goes up because of the European sanctions. And if the price goes up a lot, the risk is that Russia starts to earn more, and Europe loses the bet,” he said. Ideally, the EU would agree how much Russian oil to purchase each month to ensure the maximum pain, Villa said, but that would require constant negotiations that are not realistic given how the bloc works.

Turkey lists security risks if Sweden, Finland in NATO

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Turkey’s president outlined the activities of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party as part of his country’s objections to Sweden and Finland joining NATO and said both nations doing so would carry security risks for Turkey.

The group known as PKK has waged a 38-year insurgency against Turkey that has led to thousands of deaths. It is designated a terrorist entity by the United States and the European Union, including Sweden and Finland. However, the West’s attitude to the PKK’s Syrian wing, the People’s Protection Units, or YPG, has caused acrimony between Ankara and other NATO members. The YPG forms the backbone of the forces involved in the U.S.-led fight against Islamic State.

“Turkey maintains that the ad-

mission of Sweden and Finland entails risks for its own security and the organization’s future,” President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wrote in an article published by *The Economist* late Monday.

All NATO members must approve the two Nordic nations’ bids to join the alliance, which were propelled by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Turkey has said it won’t allow their accession unless steps are taken, but NATO leaders are looking to the summit in Spain in June as the chance for expansion.

Erdogan also said arms embargoes were “incompatible with the spirit of military partnership.”

Sweden and Finland were among countries to impose defense export restrictions on Turkey following its 2019 incursion into northeast Syria that aimed to drive back the YPG.

Littoral combat ship now plying Mideast waterways

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Navy littoral combat ship has deployed to the Middle East for the first time and is now sailing in the waters of the Red Sea.

The USS *Sioux City* and its 75 crew members arrived in the region Saturday, a statement Monday by Navy Central Command said. It had been operating in the Naples, Italy-based U.S. 6th Fleet’s area of responsibility since early May for its first mission to Europe after operations in the Caribbean Sea last year.

Cmdr. Scott Whitworth commands the ship, which includes a detachment of two MH-60S Seahawk helicopters, a Navy statement said.

While in the Red Sea, the ship will support Combined Task Force 153, which focuses on missions in the Red Sea, Bab al-Man-

deb and Gulf of Aden, the NAVCENT statement said.

“*Sioux City*’s arrival is not only historic but essential to regional maritime security, given its immediate integration with our new multinational naval task force,” said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of NAVCENT, the U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces.

The deployment comes a week after Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday told Congress that the service would like to deactivate its nine Freedom-class littoral combat ships, a group that includes the *Sioux City* and some ships that are only 2 years old.

Freedom-class ships were set to deploy to the Middle East in 2020, but that timetable was delayed after the ships were found to have an engineering flaw in their propulsion systems, Defense News reported in January.

Clinton lawyer acquitted of lying to FBI

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A lawyer for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign was acquitted Tuesday of lying to the FBI when he pushed information meant to cast suspicions on Donald Trump and Russia in the run-up to the 2016 election.

The case against Michael Sussmann was the first courtroom test of special counsel John Durham since his appointment three years ago to search for government misconduct during the investigation into potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign.

The verdict represents a setback for Durham's work, especially since Trump supporters had looked to the probe to ex-

pose what they have contended was egregious bias by law enforcement officials who investigated the former president and his campaign.

The jury deliberated on Friday afternoon and Tuesday morning before reaching its verdict.

Speaking to reporters outside the courthouse after the verdict was delivered, Sussmann said he "told the truth to the FBI, and the jury clearly recognized that with their unanimous verdict today."

He added: "Despite being falsely accused, I am relieved that justice ultimately prevailed in this case."

In a separate statement, Durham said that though he and his

team were disappointed in the outcome, they respected the jury's decision. He thanked the investigators and prosecutors on his team "for their dedicated efforts in seeking truth and justice in this case."

The trial focused on whether Sussmann, a cybersecurity attorney and former federal prosecutor, concealed from the FBI that he was representing Clinton's campaign when he presented computer data that he said showed a possible secret backchannel between Russia-based Alfa Bank and Trump's business company, the Trump Organization. The FBI investigated but quickly determined there was no suspicious contact.

The bureau's then-general

counsel and the government's star witness, James Baker, testified that he was "100% confident" that Sussmann had told him that he was not representing any client during the meeting.

Prosecutors said he was actually acting on behalf of the Clinton campaign and another client, and that he hid the information so as to make it seem more credible and to boost the chances of getting the FBI to investigate.

Lawyers for Sussmann deny that he lied, saying that it was impossible to know with certainty what he told Baker since they were the only participants in the meeting and neither of them took notes.

US senator visits Taiwan; China ups military threat

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth on Tuesday reiterated America's support for Taiwan on her second visit in a year to the self-governing island claimed by China.

Duckworth, meeting with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen, emphasized the close economic, political and security relations between Taipei and Washington.

China sent 30 military aircraft toward the island on Monday in an ongoing campaign of regular flights.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said it responded by scrambling jets, putting air defense missile systems on alert and issuing radio warnings.

Duckworth said she wanted to "emphasize our support for Taiwan security." The former Army helicopter pilot and lieutenant colonel in the National Guard cited strong bipartisan backing for a bill she has put forward promoting cooperation between Taiwan's armed forces and the National Guard.

"I do want to say that it is more than just about military. It's also about the economy," the Illinois Democrat told Tsai.

Tsai thanked the U.S. government and Congress "for the importance they place on peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," as well as Duckworth herself for "keeping a close watch on Taiwan related security issues."

China said it strongly deplores Duckworth's visit.

"Taiwan is a province of China, and there is no so-called president," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said. He urged the U.S. to end all official contacts with Taiwan.

"The U.S. government has recently sent a series of erroneous signals on the Taiwan issue," he said. "What the U.S. government should do is to put into practice President [Joe] Biden's remarks that the U.S. does not seek a new Cold War with China, does not aim to change China's system ... and does not support Taiwan independence."

Sea feud with China flares as Marcos readies for presidency

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippine government announced Tuesday a new diplomatic protest against China over disputes in the South China Sea, a long-thorny issue that has flared anew as the next Philippine president prepares to take office next month.

The Philippines has filed hundreds of diplomatic protests against Beijing in recent years for what it considers acts of aggression in the disputed waters, despite improved ties between Beijing and Manila under outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte, whose six-year term ends on June 30.

The territorial conflicts are among the key challenges President-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will face when he takes office after his landslide electoral victory on May 9. He has said he will use diplomatic means with China over the issue, the same approach adopted by Duterte, who has been criticized for not taking a more aggressive stance against Beijing's increasingly

assertive actions in the resource-rich and busy waterway.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said Tuesday that it filed a diplomatic protest over China's imposition early last month of an annual fishing ban lasting three and a half months that covers areas in the disputed waters where "the Philippines has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction."

It said the ban is not limited to Chinese fishing vessels and violates the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea and a 2016 arbitration tribunal's decision that invalidated Beijing's vast historic claims in the strategic waterway and upheld the Philippines' sovereign rights in a stretch of coastal waters called its exclusive economic zone.

China does not recognize the arbitration ruling and continues to defy it.

The Chinese ban "has no basis in law, and undermines the mutual trust, confidence and respect that should underpin bilateral relations," the department said in a statement.

US consumer confidence slips in May

Associated Press

SILVER SPRING, Md. — U.S. consumer confidence edged lower in May as Americans' view of their present and future prospects dimmed in the midst of persistent inflation.

The Conference Board said Tuesday that its consumer confidence index dipped to 106.4 in May — still a strong reading — from 108.6 in April.

The business research group's present situation index, which measures consumers' assessment of current business and labor conditions, also fell in May to 149.6 from 152.9 in April.

The expectations index, based on consumers' six-month outlook for income, business and labor market conditions, also declined in May, to 77.5 from 79 in April. It was

above 80 in February and remains a weak spot in the survey.

President Joe Biden was to meet with Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell on Tuesday as soaring inflation continues to carve up Americans' earnings.

The meeting Tuesday will be the first since Biden renominated Powell to lead the central bank and weeks after the Senate confirmed a second term.

The White House said the pair would discuss the state of the U.S. and global economy and especially four-decade high inflation, described as Biden's "top economic priority."

The Federal Reserve raised its main borrowing rate by a half point in early May, the main mechanism for combating inflation. Multiple rate hikes, with the possibility of

more half-point increases, are expected this year.

Inflation soared over the past year at its fastest pace in more than 40 years, with rising costs for just about everything negating Americans' pay raises.

The Labor Department reported earlier in May that consumer prices jumped 8.3% last month from a year ago.

That was below the 8.5% year-over-year surge in March, which was the highest since 1981. On a monthly basis, prices rose 0.3% from March to April, the smallest rise in eight months.

U.S. producer prices soared 11% in April from a year earlier, a hefty gain that indicates high inflation will remain a burden for consumers and businesses in the months ahead.

Fire out at chemical plant; residents allowed in homes

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — A three-alarm fire that raged through a Nebraska chemical plant was extinguished by Tuesday morning and nearby residents who were initially evacuated were allowed to return to their homes, authorities said.

Thick smoke billowed from the Nox-Crete facility just southwest of downtown Omaha that could be seen as far away Monday evening as the Elkhorn River, about 20 miles to the west.

Battalion Chief Scott Fitzpatrick said the first call for help came shortly before 7 p.m. Monday, and firefighters who initially en-

tered the building found a much bigger fire than they had anticipated, forcing them to retreat.

Fire crews then fought the fire from outside the building, noting the presence of chemicals and propane bottles inside. Explosions could be seen and heard as propane tanks ruptured.

No injuries were reported from the fire or explosions. Officials said the smoke posed no major toxicity risks to the public.

The cause of the fire wasn't immediately known.

According to its website, Nox-Crete makes a chemical coating and deactivator

that keeps curing concrete from bonding to forms.

It also makes liquid floor hardeners, joint fillers, curing and sealing compounds and water repellents.

A woman who answered the phone at Nox-Crete headquarters Tuesday morning said the company did not have a statement.

Those living nearby were initially encouraged to shelter in place, but an alert sent just before 9 p.m. urged some residents to evacuate.

The nearby Columbus Community Center was opened as a temporary shelter for evacuees.

Man who won \$10M in lottery gets life term for slaying

The (Raleigh, N.C.) News & Observer

A North Carolina man who scored a \$10 million lottery prize is now convicted of first-degree murder.

In August 2017, Michael Hill said he bought a non-winning ticket before deciding to try his luck on another scratch-off game. When he checked the new ticket, he discovered his "life changing" jackpot win.

"I saw the one and then the zero and it still didn't hit me," he told the N.C. Education Lottery at the time. "But then I saw the 'M.' My heart dropped down to my toes and I lost my breath."

Years after the big win, Hill has been sentenced to prison in a woman's shooting death. Prosecutors in a Friday news release didn't list attorney information for him.

The woman — 23-year-old Keonna Graham — was reported missing on July 20, 2020. Later, she was found dead with a "gunshot wound to the back of the head," according to the 15th Prosecutorial District of North Carolina.

The woman reportedly had been in a relationship with Hill for more than a year before her body was discovered at the SureStay Hotel in Shallotte, roughly 40 miles

southwest of Wilmington.

"Surveillance footage from the hotel showed Hill as the only individual in the hotel room with Graham," prosecutors wrote in their news release. "Hill was later arrested by law enforcement in Southport, North Carolina, and confessed to shooting Graham after she had been texting other men while at the hotel."

Hill worked at a nuclear plant and lived in Brunswick County at the time of his lottery win. He was 52 years old when he was arrested and charged with murder in July 2020, McClatchy News reported.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Schoolkids sick after eating cannabis candy

CA BAYSIDE — Three third-grade students at a Northern California elementary school were hospitalized after inadvertently eating cannabis gummies, authorities said.

A student shared the gummies with four other kids during their snack recess at Jacoby Creek Elementary in the Humboldt County community of Bay-side, police and school officials said. The student who brought the edibles to school didn't know they contained marijuana, they said.

Three children were taken to receive medical attention after they began to display signs of intoxication, Jacoby Creek superintendent and principal Melanie Nannizzi told parents in an email. They were released from the hospital and are doing well, Nannizzi told the Times-Standard newspaper in Eureka.

Sonic workers flee after snake found behind fryer

GA BRUNSWICK — Workers cooking burgers and tater tots in a Sonic fast-food kitchen fled after discovering an intruder hiding behind the deep fryer.

Brunswick police Lt. Matthew Wilson found employees of the Sonic drive-in huddled in the parking lot when he arrived to investigate. On the phone, they had described the culprit as brown with diamonds on its back.

"When I saw it, I could tell it was just a ball python and not a rattlesnake," Wilson told The Brunswick News.

He not only removed the non-venomous snake but also found it a new home with a friend.

Black bear that evaded capture caught, killed

WA SEATTLE — A large black bear that evaded capture in western Washington for more than two years was trapped and killed near Issaquah.

The Washington state Department of Fish and Wildlife said the 5-year-old bear was captured in the Squak Mountain area, where he had been seen in garbage containers, bird feeders and fruit trees dozens of times over nearly three years, The Seattle Times reported.

The capture had taken on greater urgency because he was frequently seen in residential areas and was wearing a collar that had grown too tight.

WDFW made the decision to "lethally remove" the bear because he was so overweight at 352 pounds—the normal weight for a similar-aged bear is about 200 pounds—and because of his habit of getting into human-provided food sources.

Man accused of taking \$600K in checks in mail

LA LAFAYETTE — One man is in custody and more arrests are expected after Lafayette police said they caught someone stealing as much as \$600,000 in checks from U.S. Postal Service drop boxes in the Lafayette area.

Beau Alexander LaFleur, 28, faces 19 counts of monetary instrument abuse, 15 counts of theft, 14 counts of forgery, two counts of identity theft and one

count each of bank fraud and illegal carrying of a weapon, police said in a news release.

Lafayette Police Sgt. Robin Green said officers made a traffic stop on LaFleur's vehicle and found "several pieces of mail" which police believe he stole from the drop boxes. LaFleur also was found in possession of a U.S. Postal key, Green said.

Work to begin to take out coal tar from river

SC COLUMBIA — Work will begin this summer to remove tens of thousands of tons of coal tar from a South Carolina river.

The Congaree River in Columbia will remain open for kayakers and boaters, but there will be some changes, The State newspaper reported.

A boat launch at private land on Senate Street will be closed for three years as Dominion Energy uses the site as its base to clean up the 40,000 tons of coal tar, which ended up in the river from a plant that burned coal to create gas from 1900 to 1950.

Clean-up crews will also build coffer dams well away from the river's shores that anyone floating or boating on the river will have to navigate around, Dominion said.

Schools chief cited for illegally passing bus

MT HELENA — Montana's top schools administrator has been cited in the case of a pickup truck that illegally passed a school bus while it was stopped to pick up students in a residential subdivision.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Elsie Arntzen was cit-

ed after speaking with an officer, said Helena Police Lt. Jayson Zander said.

According to a police report, a school bus driver said a vehicle driven by Arntzen passed his bus while it was stopped to pick up children in a Helena subdivision. The bus driver recognized Arntzen and recorded the license plate number on the red pickup truck, the police report said.

"Superintendent Arntzen does not recall the alleged incident," Brian O'Leary, spokesman for the Office of Public Instruction, said in a statement. "She does acknowledge she drives a red pickup and lives in the area."

Fireworks canceled due to piping plovers

NH HAMPTON — Fireworks shows at a popular New Hampshire beach were canceled for Memorial Day weekend and will be put on hold for several weeks because endangered piping plovers are nesting there.

Local officials hope they can still have fireworks on the Fourth of July at Hampton Beach, which is close to the Massachusetts border, the Portsmouth Herald reported.

Hampton Beach Village District Chairman Chuck Rage said two nests were found on the beach.

Piping plovers are endangered in New Hampshire and threatened nationally.

The fireworks shows will resume when the eggs hatch and the plovers abandon their nests on the beach, which could take about a month.

— From wire reports

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Rangers hammer Hurricanes in Game 7

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Nothing is fazing these New York Rangers, not multi-game series deficit nor playing in a building where no road team has won in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Instead, this resilient bunch is carrying an ever-growing confidence straight into the Eastern Conference finals, thanks to another Game 7 win and the latest strong performance from possibly the game's best goaltender.

Chris Kreider scored twice, Igor Shesterkin was strong in net again and the Rangers ended Carolina's perfect postseason run at home, beating the Hurricanes 6-2 in the decisive Game 7 of their second-round playoff series Monday night.

Kreider and Adam Fox had first-period power-play goals as the Rangers raced to a quick lead. The Rangers then rode

Shesterkin's latest offense-stymieing performance to win a fifth straight elimination game in these playoffs.

"Backs against the wall five times now," Fox said, "and we've come through all five."

Shesterkin — a finalist for both the Vezina Trophy for the league's top goalie and Hart Trophy for most valuable player — finished with 36 saves and carried the shutout well into the third period.

Now the Rangers are off to the conference finals for the first time since 2015, earning a matchup with two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay. New York will host Game 1 of that series Wednesday night.

Ryan Strome and Filip Chytil also scored in what became an unexpected rout, with Andrew Copp adding a late empty-netter. More impressively, the

Rangers' win came in an arena where the Hurricanes had gone 7-0 in the playoffs, including a Game 7 victory to beat Boston in the first round and three meetings in this series.

New York coach Gerard Gallant said Sunday he had a group of players who "have a lot of fun and they believe in themselves." They looked as if they were doing plenty of both Monday in capping a second straight comeback win from a multi-game deficit.

First, they rallied from 3-1 down to beat Pittsburgh in a seven-game series. Then, after falling in an 0-2 hole against Carolina, New York responded with more resilience, even a stubborn refusal to fade when down.

Kreider went as far as to throw in a comparison to "cockroaches."

"We don't go away, regard-

less of the score, regardless of where our game is at," Kreider said.

There were no questions about that Monday night, particularly with Shesterkin holding up against 17 first-period shots. That included one stop from flat on his back on Sebastian Aho near the right post, with Shesterkin snagging the puck between his flailing legs, as if trying to make a snow angel late in the first period.

The Rangers also helped by blocking 25 shots in front of him.

Vincent Trocheck finally beat Shesterkin with a deflection on a Tony DeAngelo shot midway through the third period, only to see the Rangers follow with Chytil's goal just 40 seconds later to push the margin to 5-1.

Max Domi also scored a late goal for the Hurricanes.

No more waiting: Horford finally reaches NBA Finals

Associated Press

MIAMI — The game was over. So, finally, was Al Horford's journey. He grabbed what turned out to be the final rebound of the Eastern Conference finals, threw the ball skyward, sprinted to join his teammates in celebration and then dropped to his knees to slap the floor.

His time has come.

The oldest player — by six years — on the Boston Celtics' roster will savor this trip to the NBA Finals in ways that his teammates simply cannot. He will finally play in the title series, with the Celtics set to open the matchup against the Golden State Warriors on Thursday night, one day before Horford's 36th birthday.

"Nobody deserves it more," Boston guard Jaylen Brown said.

Nobody in the history of the NBA has played more playoff games without making the Finals than Horford; Sunday night's

100-96 East title-clinching win in Miami was his 141st postseason appearance. When the ball is tipped in San Francisco for the start of Celtics-Warriors, that dubious distinction becomes Paul Millsap's possession; he's been in 130 playoff games, none in the Finals.

Horford didn't know what the moment — making the Finals — would be like. Turns out, it was better than he envisioned.

"Just didn't know how to act," Horford said. "Just caught up, excited. A lot of hard work. I've been a part of a lot of great teams, a lot of great teammates, and I'm so proud of this group. ... I'm really grateful to be in this position."

Horford had a previous three-year stint with the Celtics, making the East finals twice, before signing with Philadelphia and eventually getting moved to Oklahoma City. He didn't play much for the Thunder, and they traded him last summer back to

Boston — a move that worked out better than even the Celtics hoped.

His averages so far in these playoffs: 11.9 points, 9.6 rebounds and 3.5 assists while playing nearly 37 minutes per contest.

"Al could care less about the numbers," Boston guard Marcus Smart said. "He cares about the wins and this team. When he came back, that gave us a sense of security. We got Al back there, he's always going to make the right play on both ends, he's going to calm us down, he's going to show us what we missed and he's going to help us learn the game even more."

Horford isn't the Celtics' best player. But make no mistake: He is the leader. In practices, timeouts, the locker room, wherever, his voice resonates.

"It's incredible what he's done all season," coach Ime Udoka said. "As I mentioned, came into

training camp in extremely great shape, chip on his shoulder, prideful, wanted to come back to Boston. ... He lays it all out there guarding bigs, smalls and everything in between. His leadership goes without saying."

Winning the East title was hard enough, going through a No. 1 seed like Miami and having to win a Game 7 on the road.

That told only part of the story.

Horford wasn't himself in Game 6 on Friday night, when Boston had a chance to clinch the series on its home floor, and for understandable reasons. His grandfather died the day before, though family members urged Horford to keep playing.

"My grandfather was somebody that I was extremely close with, somebody that I really care for," Horford said. "All week my mom, my family were just kind of telling me to just go out there and play. That's something that he would have wanted me to do."

Gauff, Trevisan reach French Open semis

Associated Press

PARIS — Coco Gauff left Roland Garros 12 months ago crestfallen, knowing she let a big lead slip away in her major quarterfinal debut. She vowed to remember that and learn from it.

Consider that done.

Gauff, still only 18, returned to that stage Tuesday for a second time and was not about to let this one end similarly, beating 2017 U.S. Open champion and 2018 French Open runner-up Sloane Stephens 7-5, 6-2 in a matchup between Americans at Court Philippe Chatrier to reach her first Grand Slam semifinal.

“It was just a mental challenge today,” said Gauff, who began this trip to Paris by taking photos near the Eiffel Tower while holding her recently earned high school diploma. “Last year in the quarterfinals, it was a tough loss for me and I think that match made me stronger and better prepared

for the tough moments today.”

Gauff has seemed to be preparing for this sort of moment for quite some time, even before she became the youngest qualifier in Wimbledon history at age 15 and beat Venus Williams en route to the fourth round there in 2019, even before she won the French Open junior title a year prior.

One measure of how she has continued to improve: Her forehand was long considered her weaker groundstroke, but against Stephens, that produced more winners than her backhand.

“I believe in myself. Even last year, I was too focused on trying to fulfill other people’s expectations,” said Gauff, who hasn’t dropped a set through five matches. “I know no matter how good or bad my career is, I know I’m a good person, so I think that’s a good message for young people. ... Just know: If you love yourself, who cares what anyone else thinks?”

Her quick rise is quite a contrast from the long road her next opponent, Martina Trevisan of Italy, traveled along the way to her own first Slam semifinal at age 28.

The 59th-ranked Trevisan is emotive as can be, and she screamed while thrusting both arms overhead and letting her racket fly after eliminating U.S. Open finalist Leylah Fernandez, who was seeded 17th, by a 6-2, 6-7 (3), 6-3 score in a match between a pair of left-handers.

Fernandez was treated by a trainer for a problem with her right foot after the match’s fifth game and her movement was hampered throughout. About three hours following the match, reporters were told that Fernandez would not speak to the media “on advice of the tournament medical team due to” the injury.

Trevisan eventually finished things off nearly an hour after holding her first match point

while serving for the victory at 5-4 in the second set. She double-faulted twice in the ensuing tiebreaker.

“I felt a lot of tension,” Trevisan said later, “and I was so nervous ... my arms felt it.”

So after that lapse, Trevisan took a trip to the locker room.

“I was very tired and I had to go to the bathroom. I got just a quick moment alone in a room, away from the court, away from any people, in silence. It gave me a chance to regroup. I threw some water on my face,” she said. “I was playing to get to a semifinal, and I still had a set in front of me, so I had to start from scratch.”

The reset worked wonders.

Trevisan grabbed the initial seven points of the third set and took a 4-0 lead in what would become her 10th consecutive victory on the heels of earning her first WTA title at Rabat, Morocco, the week before the French Open.

Tennessee’s dominance earns NCAA overall No. 1 seed

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — After finishing one of the most dominant runs in Southeastern Conference history, Tennessee was selected the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA baseball tournament Monday.

The Volunteers (53-7) won 31 of their first 32 games, swept the SEC regular-season and tournament titles and have the best pitching and batting statistics in the nation.

They’ve been the consensus No. 1 team in the polls all but one week since March 28 and enter regionals having won eight straight and 12 of 13.

“It’s really cool to win the SEC Tournament,” Tennessee slugger Drew Gilbert said, “but we have bigger goals in mind and know we still have a lot of baseball in front of us.”

The 64-team tournament opens Friday in 16 regionals. Winners advance to eight best-of-three super regionals. Those winners move on to the College World Series in Omaha.

The top eight national seeds are assured of hosting super regionals if they win their regionals.

The national seeds following the Vols: Stanford (41-14), Oregon State (44-15), Virginia Tech (41-12), Texas A&M (37-18), Miami (39-18), Oklahoma State (39-20) and East Carolina (42-18).

Stanford, which won the Pac-12 regular-season and tournament titles, is a national seed for the first time since it was No. 2 in 2018. Oregon State gives the Pac-12 two of the top three seeds for the first time.

Virginia Tech, which was

picked second to last in the Atlantic Coast Conference’s Coastal Division, has its highest seed in program history and will be playing in a regional for the first time since 2013.

Texas A&M won its last seven SEC series under first-year coach Jim Schlossnagle to lock up a national seed after not making the tournament last year.

East Carolina will play in the tournament for a 32nd time. The Pirates hold the distinction of having made the most appearances without reaching a CWS.

Seeds nine through 16: Texas (42-19), North Carolina (38-19), Southern Mississippi (43-16), Louisville (38-18-1), Florida (39-22), Auburn (37-19), Maryland (45-12) and Georgia Southern (40-18).

The ACC and SEC had the most teams selected, with nine apiece. The Big 12 and Pac-12 each got five teams in, and the Sun Belt Conference has four teams in the field.

Tennessee opens regional play against Alabama State (34-23). The other teams playing in Knoxville are Campbell (40-17) and Georgia Tech (34-22).

The last four teams picked for regionals were Florida State, Grand Canyon, Liberty and Mississippi. The first four out were North Carolina State, Old Dominion, Rutgers and Wofford.

Selection committee chairman and Army athletic director Mike Buddie said Ole Miss got the nod over N.C. State because it performed a bit stronger in regular-season conference series.

Valdez's 2-hitter thwarts Athletics

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Yordan Álvarez hit a pair of no-doubt homers, Framber Valdez pitched a two-hitter for a rare complete game and the Houston Astros beat the Oakland Athletics 5-1 on Monday.

After being held to five runs the previous four games, the Astros' bats woke up against Athletics ace Paul Blackburn (5-1).

Álvarez hit a 469-foot drive to give Houston its first run in the fourth inning against Blackburn and added a 444-foot shot to nearly the same spot in the eighth off A.J. Puk for his 14th homer of the season.

Jose Altuve also went deep with a two-run homer in the fifth that was the 174th of his career, tied with George Springer for fifth most by an Astros player.

That was more than enough support for Valdez (5-2), who threw just the seventh nine-inning complete game in the majors this season. He struck out seven, walked three and threw 114 pitches in the longest outing in his five-year career.

Giants 5, Phillies 4 (10): Curt Casali hit a two-run homer in the 10th inning as visiting San Francisco extended Philadelphia's losing streak to four.

Wilmer Flores and Evan Longoria also homered for the Giants. Kyle Schwarber, Nick Castellanos and Rhys Hoskins went deep for the Phillies, who lost in extra innings for the second straight day.

Rockies 7, Marlins 1: Pinch-hitter Yonathan Daza doubled to drive in three runs in the bottom of the seventh inning, helping host Colorado rally past Miami.

The game also included the longest home run of the season in the MLB, a 496-foot shot in the second inning from the Marlins' Jesús Sánchez. It reached the third deck concourse at Coors Field.

Tigers 7, Twins 5: Jonathan Schoop be-

came the third player from Curaçao with 1,000 major league hits and finished a home run shy of the cycle to help host Detroit beat Minnesota.

Schoop, a 30-year-old infielder in his 10th big league season, singled in the third inning, doubled in the fifth for his 1,000th hit and tripled leading off the seventh as part of a 3-for-5 afternoon.

Cardinals 6, Padres 3: Nolan Gorman hit a go-ahead, two-run homer, rookie Andre Pallante got his first big league win in his 17th appearance and host St. Louis beat San Diego.

Paul Goldschmidt also hit two-run homer for the Cardinals. He has a 21-game hitting streak and has reached base safely in a career-high 35 consecutive games, the longest streak in the major leagues this season.

Rangers 9, Rays 5: Rangers center fielder Eli White made a sensational leaping catch to take away a three-run homer from Ji-Man Choi in the first inning, and later hit a long home run in host Texas' win over Tampa Bay.

White sprinted to the warning track in left-center and timed his jump perfectly. His upper body was well above the 6-foot wall fronting the Rays bullpen and his left arm fully extended above his head when he made the grab more than 400 feet from home plate.

Guardians 7, Royals 3: Andrés Giménez hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning off rookie Collin Snider, sending host Cleveland over an injury-riddled Kansas City team.

Pirates 6, Dodgers 5: Michael Perez hit a tying single in the ninth inning and pinch-runner Michael Chavis scored the go-ahead run on Freddie Freeman's error at first base to give Pittsburgh a wild win at Los Angeles.

Diamondbacks 6, Braves 2: Pavin Smith

hit a three-run homer, Zac Gallen had another strong start on the mound and host Arizona beat Atlanta.

The Diamondbacks took a 6-2 lead in the fifth, scoring three runs a few minutes after manager Torey Lovullo was thrown out of the game for arguing. Ketel Marte had a two-out, two-run double and David Peralta followed with an RBI single that brought home Marte.

Mets 13, Nationals 5: Starling Marte and Nick Plummer each homered and finished with four RBIs as host New York rode an early offensive outburst to rout Washington.

The top three batters in the Mets' order — Luis Guillorme, Marte and Francisco Lindor — combined to reach base in their first nine plate appearances, all of which occurred in the first three innings against Nationals starter Erick Fedde (3-4) and reliever Andres Machado.

Orioles 10, Red Sox 0: Tyler Wells pitched six smooth innings of two-hit ball and Baltimore got early homers from Ryan Mountcastle and Ramón Urías to win at Boston.

Anthony Santander sealed the Orioles' third win in the five-game series with a three-run homer in the ninth.

Brewers 7-3, Cubs 6-1: Tyrone Taylor homered in both games, Aaron Ashby (1-3) struck out a career-high 12 in the nightcap and Milwaukee swept a doubleheader at Chicago.

Luis Urías lined three-run homer into the basket in left-center to break a seventh-inning tie in the opener. The Brewers trailed 4-2 before Taylor's two-run homer in the sixth off Matt Swarmer, and Milwaukee led 2-1 in the second game when Taylor homered off left-hander Brandon Hughes in the eighth.

Cardinals defensive back Gladney dies in crash

Associated Press

DALLAS — Jeff Gladney, a defensive back for the Arizona Cardinals, has died in a car crash in Dallas. He was 25. Gladney's death was confirmed by the Cardinals and his agent, Brian Overstreet.

Gladney played at TCU and was a 2020 first-round draft pick of the Minnesota Vikings. He

was released before the 2021 season after being charged with assaulting a woman.

The Cardinals signed Gladney in March after he was found not guilty in Dallas County, Texas. He participated in team drills last week. The Cardinals said they're "devastated" to learn about Gladney's death.

Maryland wins NCAA men's lacrosse title

EAST HARTFORD, Conn. — Anthony DeMaio scored four first-half goals for his fifth hat trick in his last six games, Logan McNaney made 17 saves to be named the NCAA Tournament's most outstanding player and top-seeded Maryland completed a

perfect season by holding off Cornell 9-7 on Monday to win the men's lacrosse title.

Twins' Correa tests positive for COVID-19

DETROIT — Carlos Correa has tested positive for COVID-19, the Minnesota Twins said after a 7-5 loss to the Detroit Tigers.