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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Bomber strikes Afghan mosque

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide bomber killed 30 people at a Shiite mosque in the Afghan capital on Monday, officials said, a month after the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for two attacks targeting Shiite worshippers in this predominantly Sunni country.

The Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan also claimed responsibility for Monday's attack, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors militant postings.

The blast wounded scores of others, including women and children, said Fareed Obiadi, head of criminal investigations for the Kabul police.

The attacker was on foot and detonated a suicide vest on the first floor of the Baqir-ul Ulom mosque in the west section of the capital while worshippers attended a religious ceremony, Obiadi said.

Hussain Kazemi, a shopkeep-

er who works about 100 meters from the mosque, rushed to the scene after hearing the explosion. "I went to the mosque to help the wounded after the blast, but I could not help because there was blood everywhere and I got sick," he said.

Thirty people died in the blast, the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

Sectarian attacks have been rare in Afghanistan; however, the Islamic State group, which considers Shiites apostates, has claimed responsibility for a spate of violence targeting followers of the sect throughout the country this year.

Last month, during the Shiite festival of Ashura, a mass shooting at the Karte Sakhi mosque in Kabul left at least 16 worshippers dead. A day later, an explosion at a Shiite mosque in northern Balkh province killed at least 14. The Islamic State group said it was behind both attacks.

The group also claimed twin bombings on a protest by minority Shiite Hazaras in Kabul

in July that killed 84 people, the deadliest attack in the capital since a U.S.-led invasion removed the Taliban from power in 2001.

The United Nations mission in Afghanistan condemned Monday's bombing, describing it as the "latest effort by extremists to stoke sectarian violence" in the country.

"These are just the efforts of Afghanistan's enemies to create sectarian tension and use the situation for their own goals, whether it is Daesh or others," said Gen. Nazeefa Zaki, using an Arabic name for the Islamic State group.

"There are Sikhs and Ismailis in Afghanistan and many other groups, but they are not attacked," said Zaki, a member of parliament. "There are tensions between Sunni Muslims and Shiites in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. The enemies want to have the same situation in Afghanistan too."

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Iraqi troops search for car bombs in Mosul

Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq — Iraqi troops fighting Islamic State militants in the eastern outskirts of Mosul regrouped on Monday in neighborhoods they recently retook from the extremist group, conducting house-to-house searches and looking for would-be suicide car bombs, a top Iraqi commander said.

Maj. Gen. Sami al-Arudi, of the Iraqi military's special forces, told The Associated Press that his men also foiled two attempted suicide car bombings earlier in the day, firing from a U.S.-made tank on the approaching vehicles, which exploded before hitting their intended targets.

A civilian woman was wounded in the blasts, the commander said.

The Iraqi military launched a campaign Oct. 17 to retake Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city and the extremist group's last major urban bastion in the country. Most gains have been made by the special forces operating in the part of the city east of the Tigris River. Other forces are advancing on the city from different directions, and the U.S.-led coalition is providing airstrikes and other support.

Monday's pause and the continuing danger to troops posed by suicide car bombs and sniper fire underline the difficulty of the campaign — even in eastern Mosul where Iraq's most combat-seasoned troops are operating. Weighing heavily on their battle plans is the safety of some 1 million civilians still living in Mosul, a sprawling city cut in half by the Tigris.

Afghan forces launch rare winter operation

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan forces on Monday launched a winter military operation against the Taliban and other insurgent groups, abandoning a tradition of suspending fighting during the colder months of the year.

Operation Shafaq Two will be carried out in 13 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, officials said.

"The aim is to continue eliminating the terrorists inside Afghanistan, targeting their supply routes, recruitment plac-

es and those areas where they gather and have hideouts," said Gen. Mohammad Radmanish, deputy spokesman for the Defense Ministry.

Shafaq Two is a continuation of Operation Shafaq, which was launched in late March. It will last until spring, when the traditional fighting season begins, Radmanish said.

"Since Operation Shafaq was full of achievements throughout the summer and it defeated the Taliban's offensives, it was decided to start the second phase of it for the winter," he said.

No other details about the forces engaged were immediately available.

Afghan forces were able this year to prevent the Taliban from occupying any major population centers, with the help of U.S. advisers and Special Forces. The provincial capitals of Helmand, Kunduz and Farah have been repeatedly threatened by the guerrillas.

Still, the Taliban reportedly control more territory now than at any time since the U.S.-led invasion removed them from power in 2001.

Some Afghan analysts believe the military needs the winter campaign to roll back those Taliban gains.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Putin warns of 'countermeasures' to NATO

The Washington Post

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin is warning that his forces could target NATO sites if the country feels threatened, sharply raising the stakes against the Western alliance even as President-elect Donald Trump calls for greater outreach with the Kremlin.

"We must take countermeasures, that is, strike with our missile systems the targets that, in our opinion, begin to threaten us," Putin said in an interview with American filmmaker Oliver Stone for a documentary broadcast Monday.

The Stone-produced documentary — about the conflict in Ukraine between pro-Moscow separatists and the Western-allied government — premiered on Russian television after advance transcripts of Putin's remarks were circulated by Russian state-run media.

Putin's comments were among his sharpest rebukes to NATO as the alliance increasingly focuses on perceived threats from Russia. Earlier Monday, Russia announced it has bolstered its defensive missile strength in the Eastern European

enclave of Kaliningrad.

For years, the Kremlin has voiced concerns about the membership in NATO of former Soviet republics and countries from the former East Bloc. Putin said smaller NATO countries would find it "next to impossible to resist pressure from a major NATO leader such as the United States" to deploy missile systems or host new bases.

"And what are we supposed to do? We are forced to take countermeasures, that is, to aim our missile systems at those facilities which we think pose a threat to us," he stressed. "The situation is heating up."

NATO, meanwhile, has moved to strengthen its presence along its eastern flanks, including the Baltic states. But a major wild card has been introduced by the election victory of Trump, who has suggested that his administration will seek to improve relations with Russia.

"Why are we reacting to NATO expansion so emotionally? We are concerned by NATO's decision-making," Putin said in the interview for Stone's "Ukraine on Fire."

Hours before the broadcast, Russia said it had deployed mobile coastal defense

missiles to Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave wedged between Lithuania and Poland. In October, Putin stationed nuclear-capable cruise missiles in Kaliningrad, further arming a region already bristling with weaponry on both sides.

The growing brinkmanship also extends to defenses against possible cyberattacks.

Finland's undersecretary of state, Jori Arvonen, told reporters Monday that a joint NATO-European Union center is planned for Helsinki to study "hybrid" warfare, including cyberespionage and propaganda via social media.

Arvonen said the planned center seeks to battle online incursions that could be "diplomatic, military, technological or financial in their nature."

U.S. intelligence officials suspect high-level Russian involvement in email hacks targeting Hillary Clinton's campaign chief and others during the presidential campaign.

Putin has expressed optimism that the election of Trump, who has questioned the U.S. commitment to NATO allies, might improve relations with the United States, currently at a post-Cold War low.

Risk rising for US forces in Somalia as mission grows

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — U.S. special operations forces working with Somali troops are facing increased risk in an advisory mission that has shifted from basic soldiering to complex battlefield missions, said U.S. Africa Command's Gen. Thomas Waldhauser.

"When you get into that phase of (troops) accompanying, that should tell you that the units you're working with are at a point where the military operations they undertake become a little more complex and a little more dangerous," Waldhauser said in an interview at his Stuttgart headquarters.

The forward presence of U.S. forces, combined with a spike in airstrikes against the al-Shabab insurgent group, is the most significant sign of es-

calation in the country since 18 American soldiers were killed there in 1993. In 2016, at least 14 strikes or raids have been carried out in the country, compared with only a handful a year earlier.

The intensification of operations raises questions about whether U.S. forces are being sucked deeper into a country that has resisted attempts by outsiders to impose order.

"AFRICOM's attempts to mask direct combat operations against al-Shabab targets such as training camps and IED factories as advise and assist missions whitewashes the more than 10-year-old war that the Somali government, the African Union, and the United States has waged against al-Qaeda's branch in Somalia," the Long Wars Journal said in a recent analysis after a series of high-profile strikes in September.

US celebrates Serbian support for WWII mission

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — More than 70 years after villagers in rural Serbia risked their lives to rescue hundreds of Allied airmen from behind Nazi lines, U.S. and Serbian military and government officials are helping to ensure their story isn't forgotten.

On Friday, the State Department, the U.S. Air Force, the British air force, Serbian armed forces and local government officials attended a commemoration event in the town of Pranjani, Serbia, to honor the villagers who did the heavy lifting — literally — in Operation Halyard.

The operation resulted in the rescue of more than 500 Allied airmen from German-occupied Serbia — then part of the former Yugoslavia — over a six-month period between July

and December 1944, without a single casualty or loss of a transport plane.

Planned and organized by the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA, it's considered one of the greatest rescue missions of World War II and remains the largest rescue operation of U.S. airmen in history.

"It was pretty amazing what these common people did to take care of people they didn't even know but who had a common enemy against the Nazis," said Brig. Gen. Randy Huston, who represented the U.S. Air Force at the ceremony and at other events last week in Serbia.

Huston spoke to villagers, local mayors and other officials at the outdoor ceremony held on a hilltop field where a makeshift airstrip was built during the war to facilitate the airmen's rescue.

Back in Manhattan, Trump holds parade of meetings

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump returned to his perch high above Manhattan on Monday, meeting with former rivals and longtime allies a day after he indicated he had worked out agreements to fill major posts in his administration.

Trump, after spending the weekend receiving a parade of visitors at his golf course in New Jersey, was set to do the same at Trump Tower. Among his scheduled visitors: former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who ran against him in the Republican primary; longtime ally Newt Gingrich, the former speaker of the House of Representatives; and Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin.

"We've made a couple of deals," Trump told reporters at his Bedminster, N.J., golf club on Sunday. He gave assurance

es that "incredible meetings" would be bringing "incredible people" into the government. "You'll be hearing about them soon."

The president-elect apparently is working to get important Cabinet jobs settled before heading to Florida for Thanksgiving. Aides said Monday he will spend the holiday at his Mar-a-Lago estate. He is expected to fly there either Tuesday or Wednesday, while Vice President-elect Mike Pence will spend Thanksgiving in Mississippi, where his Marine son is stationed.

Trump made a flurry of brief public appearances during the weekend, often with Pence at his side, to flash frequent thumbs-ups and to provide quick updates on his progress in building a government. Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential nominee in 2012, was "under active and serious consideration" for

secretary of state, Pence said. Trump said retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis was an "impressive" prospect for defense secretary.

Kellyanne Conway, a senior adviser for the transition, said Monday the president-elect wanted to hear viewpoints from across the political spectrum, including from "Never Trumpers" who she said "are looking forward to having a say in what happens next." She also said Trump would receive a visit from Hawaii Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who resigned her Democratic National Committee post after endorsing Bernie Sanders over Hillary Clinton.

Between conversations Sunday, Trump revealed he was making transition plans for his family too. He told reporters that his wife, Melania, and their 10-year-old son, Barron, would move to Washington when the school year ends.

Officers ambushed in Texas, Missouri

Associated Press

A police officer was fatally shot in Texas and another in Missouri was shot in the face but is expected to survive in what authorities are calling the latest in a series of targeted attacks on law enforcement.

The detective in San Antonio was writing out a traffic ticket when he was shot to death in his squad car late Sunday morning outside police headquarters. In St. Louis, a police sergeant was hospitalized in critical condition Sunday evening after he was shot twice while he sat in traffic in a marked police vehicle.

San Antonio police Chief William McManus identified the officer killed Sunday as Benjamin Marconi, 50, a 20-year veteran of the force.

Police said the search for a male suspect was still underway early Monday and that no arrest has been made.

St. Louis Police Chief Sam Dotson declined to name the 46-year-old officer on his force who was shot in the face, but said he is a married father of three who has been with the department for about 20 years.

Police reported early Monday that the suspect, who was wanted for other violent crimes, was later killed in a shootout with police.

At least two other police officers were shot in other cities Sunday night but it wasn't clear whether the incidents were targeted attacks.

An officer with the Gladstone, Mo., police department near Kansas City was shot, and the suspect was shot and killed. The Gladstone Police Department said on Twitter on Monday that the officer, whose name has not been released, is out of surgery and expected to make a full recovery.

A Sanibel, Fla., officer who was shot in the shoulder during a traffic stop was treated for his injuries and was released.

Water cannons used at ND protest

Associated Press

CANNON BALL, N.D. — Tension flared anew on the Dakota Access pipeline as protesters tried to push past a long-blocked bridge on a state highway, only to be turned back by a line of law enforcement using water cannons and what appeared to be tear gas.

Sunday's skirmishes began around 6 p.m. after protesters removed a burned-out truck on what's known as the Backwater Bridge, not far from the encampment where they've been for weeks as they demonstrate against the pipeline. The Morton County Sheriff's Department estimated 400 protesters sought to cross the bridge on state Highway 1806.

A live stream early Monday showed a continued standoff, with large lights illuminat-

ing smoke wafting across the scene.

The Sheriff's Department said in a statement around 1 a.m. Monday that approximately 100 to 200 protesters were on the bridge or in the vicinity. It said law enforcement officers "had rocks thrown at them, burning logs and rocks shot from slingshots," and that one officer had been hit on the head by a thrown rock.

At least one person was arrested. Protesters said a gym in Cannon Ball was opened to aid demonstrators who were soaked on a night the temperature dipped into the low 20s or were hit with tear gas.

Rema Loeb told The Associated Press he was forced to retreat from the bridge because he feared being doused with water on the freezing night. Others needed medical treatment after

being hit with tear gas, he said.

"It's been just horrible," said Loeb, 83, who traveled from Massachusetts about two weeks ago to join the protests.

The 1,200-mile, four-state pipeline is being built to carry oil from western North Dakota to a shipping point in Illinois. But construction of the \$3.8 billion pipeline has been protested for months by the Standing Rock Sioux, whose reservation lies near the pipeline route, and the tribe's allies, who fear a leak could contaminate their drinking water. They also worry that construction could threaten sacred sites.

Dallas-based Energy Transfer Partners has said no sites have been disturbed and that the pipeline will have safeguards against leaks and is a safer method of transport for oil than rail or truck.

Death toll rises in India train derailment

Associated Press

PUKHAYAN, India — The death toll from India's worst train accident in years rose to 146 on Monday after rescuers used cranes to lift the last of the twisted metal wreckage to check for bodies underneath.

About 2,000 workers were clearing the tracks and checking for damage to the rail line in hopes of resuming traffic through one of India's busiest railway junctions by Monday evening, railway official Amit Kumar said. The government called for an investigation into what caused the accident.

The passenger train was about midway through a 27-hour journey between the cities

of Indore and Patna when it slid off the tracks at 3:10 a.m. Sunday. The impact was so strong that one of the coaches landed atop another, crushing the one below. Passengers were flung from their beds.

Rescue workers, soldiers and members of India's disaster management force pulled out people trapped inside the twisted metal and overturned coaches near Pukhrayan, a village outside Kanpur about 250 miles southeast of New Delhi.

They used cutting torches to pry open cars and cranes to lift coaches from the tracks, moving carefully to avoid injuring those trapped inside. By Monday afternoon, they had lifted

the last of the 14 wrecked cars from the tracks, finding no more bodies beneath.

The accident killed at least 146, according to state official Debasish Panda. Doctors said 116 of the victims had been identified.

Roughly 226 people were hurt, including 76 with serious injuries, according to local police Inspector General Zaki Ahmad. Medical teams provided first aid near the site, while those in more serious condition were moved to hospitals.

Anxious relatives searched for missing family members among the injured and the dead at hospitals in Kanpur.

At the accident site, some sift-

ed through luggage scattered across the ground in hopes of finding clues to where someone might have been at the time of the crash.

"I am looking for my brother," said Ramanand Tiwari, according to the Press Trust of India news agency. "He may have changed his seat ... we have searched everywhere."

Nearby, a man sobbed after seeing the bodies of three family members who had been traveling together to a wedding.

"Whoever I tried to look for is dead," Nirmal Verma told PTI. "I haven't found my mother. ... I fear I will find her in the same condition."

Japanese troops arrive in S. Sudan with new mandate

Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan — Japanese peacekeepers, with a broader mandate to use force, landed in South Sudan on Monday, the first overseas deployment of the country's troops with those expanded powers in nearly 70 years.

Dressed in a green, camouflage uniform, Squad leader Yoshino Tanaka stepped off the plane at the head of the Japanese group. He was greeted by Japan's ambassador to South Sudan, Masahiko Kiya.

The 350 Self-Defense Forces members will replace a previous contingent of Japanese peacekeepers who served in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan but did not have a mandate to use force. The new troops will be tasked with engineering and construction in the capital, Juba.

For the first time since the end of World War II, when Japan enacted a law enshrining pacifism in its military, these peacekeepers will have the ability to use force to protect civilians, U.N. staff and themselves.

For Japan, the deployment shows the growing trust the public places in its Self-Defense Forces, Sheila Smith, a senior fellow for Japan studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, told The Associated Press.

However, she said that many "people are worried that this first case of the Self-

Defense Forces' greater powers could run into problems and be put into a bad situation in South Sudan."

Approved in 2015, the expanded capacity to use force was opposed by some in Japan who feared that it could entangle the country's military in an overseas conflict and that it violates Japan's anti-war constitution.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe argued that the broader military powers give Japan the ability to respond to growing threats that include China's growing military assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

The Self-Defense Forces' expanded powers will be tested first in South Sudan, the troubled East African nation that has seen continuous fighting since its civil war broke out in December 2013. There are more than 12,000 U.N. peacekeepers already in South Sudan. They have faced criticism for failing to protect civilians.

In July, two Chinese peacekeepers died and five others were wounded after their vehicle was struck with a rocket propelled grenade as fighting swept Juba.

Japan's Self-Defense Forces will still not be able to engage with an opposing army — like South Sudan's — the only force that is currently in the capital, said the Council on Foreign Relations' Smith.

"It's not as if Japan has unleashed its military," she said.

Reagan back in Yokosuka following patrol

BY TYLER HLAVAC

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier strike group returned Monday to its homeport of Yokosuka after a three-month patrol in the Western Pacific.

The Reagan, along with aircraft from Carrier Air Wing 5 and several other warships, made port calls and exercised with regional allies and partners.

In September, the strike group joined Valiant Shield, a 12-day exercise on Guam that involved 18,000 personnel and 180 aircraft, practicing sea warfare and amphibious landings with elements of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

In October, the Reagan traveled to South Korea for Invincible Spirit drills, leading to condemnation from the North, which conducted a failed missile test hours before the ship docked in Busan.

The nuclear-powered Reagan's visit to the Korean Peninsula was a show of force after Pyongyang conducted two underground nuclear tests and fired several missiles in the face of toughened United Nations sanctions and international condemnation.

On the final leg of the patrol, the carrier group joined Keen Sword drills with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force near Guam.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Possible cannonball in vehicle is removed

AR HOT SPRINGS — Authorities in Hot Springs have removed a possible cannonball that was found outside a local business.

The Sentinel-Record reported an Arkansas State Police bomb squad removed the device from the trunk of a car Thursday and took it away for disposal.

The object was found in the trunk of a vehicle parked at Grand Gallery Antiques and Uniques in Hot Springs. Hot Springs Police Community Relations Officer Joey Williams said the cannonball appeared to be live and from the Civil War era.

8 deer carcasses put near home removed

MI HART — A county road commission in northern Michigan has removed the rotting carcasses of eight deer that were dumped about 200 yards from a home.

The dead deer were on state land in Oceana County's Weare Township.

They were relatively close to the home of Tami Smith. She said the road commission apologized and blamed it on a mistake by a new employee.

The road commission removes dead deer hit by vehicles.

In rarity, rescued sea turtle has only 1 lung

MA BOSTON — The New England Aquarium said it has discovered a rescued sea turtle has only one lung.

The aquarium said being born with one lung is an extremely rare medical condition for a vertebrate, and this turtle

dramatically defied the odds to live this long.

It said the turtle is 2 to 3 years old. They hope it will be released back into the ocean eventually.

The annual sea turtle stranding season occurs in November and December on Cape Cod. Mass Audubon volunteers and staff search the beaches for cold-stunned turtles.

Official backs staff in school burger flap

PA DUBOIS — A Pennsylvania school district superintendent is defending his food service staff over a photo of an overcooked school cafeteria hamburger that was posted online.

A student at DuBois Area High School posted the picture on the town's regional Facebook page to show people what a friend was served at school on Nov. 14.

Superintendent Luke Lansberry said cafeteria workers are required to cook burgers to at least 155 degrees but were cooking burgers to 170 degrees. He said the burger depicted is the only one of 300 served that drew a complaint and he wishes the student had returned it for a new one.

Woman under pet ban guilty of contempt

ME FARMINGTON — A New Sharon woman barred from having pets stemming from prior animal cruelty convictions has been convicted of contempt of court after authorities said she was seen with animals.

Carol Murphy, 71, was convicted Wednesday after she was found with dogs, a cat, a potbellied pig, chinchillas and a rabbit in 2014.

Murphy was convicted of

animal cruelty in 2005 and was banned from having pets. She was convicted of the charge five years later, and again was barred from owning animals.

Gun brought to school by student discharges

MN ST. PAUL — St. Paul police said a gun brought to an elementary school by a 7-year-old student discharged but no one was hurt.

The school district said the gun was brought into a classroom at Crossroads Elementary, and the weapon discharged into the floor at 8:40 a.m. Thursday.

Police spokesman Sgt. Mike Ernster told the St. Paul Pioneer Press authorities are investigating how the first-grader got the gun and what led to the gun firing.

The district said such actions have "serious consequences," and it will follow its standard discipline procedures.

Inmates' 'mannequin challenge' probed

AL MONTGOMERY — Inmates in an Alabama prison are taking part in the "mannequin challenge" sweeping the country, using an illegal cellphone.

Al.com reported that the men wearing prisoner clothing labeled Alabama Department of Corrections shot a nearly minutelong video of themselves freezing in various positions. They can be seen staging a fight, doing push-ups, reading on their cots and praying, both Christians and Muslims.

A spokesman for the Alabama Department of Corrections, Bob Horton, told the newspaper they are investigating where the video came from. Horton said the department has

confiscated more than 3,000 illegal cellphones this year from its prisons, which are being investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Police: Armed robbers stole purses at church

AZ TUCSON — Police in Tucson said they're searching for five suspects in connection with an armed robbery at a church.

They said five young males wearing masks entered a church on the city's south side where up to 50 women of various ages were attending a faith-based meeting.

The suspects ordered the women to get on the floor before taking their purses at gunpoint.

Police Department spokesman Sgt. Pete Dugan said the five suspects are either teenagers or in their early 20s and some spoke only Spanish during the robbery.

Dugan says some of the older female victims suffered minor injuries when they were forced to the ground by the robbers.

Car crashes into an apartment; man killed

WA KENT — Authorities in northwestern Washington said a man in an apartment died after a car crashed through one of the building's walls.

Officials with the Kent Fire Department said two people in the car weren't injured in the crash on Saturday night.

The fire department said crews jacked up the car but the man was pronounced dead at the scene.

Names haven't been released.

Police are investigating.

From wire reports

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Jimmie Johnson wins 7th title

Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Jimmie Johnson had the commemorative helmet and a photographer chronicling his every move. He had even planned to run a symbolic seven miles the night before his shot at a seventh championship.

He's adamant he didn't know something special was coming.

Johnson was the worst of the championship contenders in a winner-take-all season finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway. He needed only to beat three other drivers to tie Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt as drivers with seven titles, but he was clearly not in the same league as the other finalists Sunday night.

Johnson didn't panic, keeping the same calmness he's had for 10 weeks of this historic march. So relaxed before this event, he canceled his "short run" and instead spent the night eating pasta.

And as he chased Carl Edwards, reigning champion Kyle Busch and Joey Logano, it sure seemed like there was not shot at No. 7.

"I'm sure the world felt like anybody but Jimmie Johnson was going to win the championship with 20 to go, and then it changed so quick," Johnson said.

Johnson was practically gifted his seventh title when Edwards' aggressive attempt to win the championship ended in a wreck. Johnson got the restart of his life in overtime, took the lead on the very last lap of the race, won for the first time in his career at Homestead and grabbed the final Sprint Cup trophy.

Most of the race was spent talking about backflips, repeats or a Penske sweep because Johnson just wasn't as good as Edwards, Busch or Logano.

Then all that conversation took a back seat to a record-setting — albeit improbable — championship run. The win was the 15th for Hendrick Motorsports and seventh for crew chief Chad Knaus, who now only trails Dale Inman's record

eight.

"When I was coming to the checkered flag, I had to really look closely at it going by to make sure it was, 'Like is this really happening?'" Johnson said.

Johnson's No. 48 Chevrolet was pulled off pit road by NASCAR shortly before the race and forced to make a last-minute pass through inspection, setting Johnson up for a mind-boggling race in which he never seemed to be a legitimate contender. He had to start last because of the inspection issue and seemingly had no shot until Edwards coughed up the title.

Petty welcomed Johnson to the VIP section of NASCAR's most exclusive club.

"They set a goal to get where they are and circumstances and fate made it a reality," Petty said. "Jimmie is a great champion and this is really good for our sport."

He also was feted by Hendrick Motorsports teammate Dale Earnhardt Jr., who represented his late father in Victory Lane.

"I told Jimmie I wish Dad was here to shake his hand," Earnhardt said. "Dad would think he's such a bad-ass. He's such a great race car driver. How he won this thing tonight, I don't think a lot of people know, he can will himself to get (his all) out of a car when it matters. There's a lot of circumstance that played into it, but he put himself in that position."

Edwards was in position to win until a caution with 10 laps remaining set up a wild sequence that ruined his title hopes. Edwards tried to block Logano on the restart, wound up wrecked, and it was Johnson who drove through the carnage to take the championship lead.

Johnson withstood two more restarts and dedicated the final two attempts at the win to the late Ricky Hendrick, who was one of 10 friends and family members killed in a 2004 plane crash.

"My heart was full because I was thinking of some loved ones like Ricky Hendrick and

his influence," he said. "Something happened from above."

Johnson drove the entire 10-race Chase with a tribute helmet to Earnhardt and Petty, the Hall of Fame drivers he's been chasing since he won his sixth title in 2013. Immediately after the race, he gifted the helmet to three-time champion Tony Stewart, who retired at the end of the race.

Drivers have been giving Stewart special helmets the last month, but Johnson had earmarked this one for the driver forever known as "Smoke."

"I promised him I'd give him a helmet, I wanted to wait and see if I could give him this one," Johnson said. "He doesn't really want it. He said if I want it back, I can have it back, but I promised I'd give him a helmet."

The title was there for the taking for Edwards until the fateful sequence that changed history.

"I was racing for my life up to that point," Edwards said. "I just pushed the issue as hard as I could because I figured that was the race there. I had to push it, I couldn't go to bed tonight and think that I gave him that lane."

The benefactor of Edwards' error was Johnson, who darted through the wreck ahead of Busch and Logano. Knaus pumped his fists in joy, all too aware that they were suddenly in the game.

"That's what makes a seven-time champion — someone that fights and battles and digs and never gives up," said four-time champion Jeff Gordon, the teammate who discovered Johnson for Hendrick Motorsports. "They keep themselves in position and allowed some of those unfortunate instances to work in their favor. You can say luck, whatever you want to say, but those guys battled. They battled hard."

After a caution forced another restart, Johnson got the start of his life and jumped into the lead. He didn't look back, only forward at his slice of NASCAR history.

Another tough loss for Edwards

Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Carl Edwards' latest championship loss might have been even more painful than his first.

Leading the NASCAR season finale with 10 laps to go and closing in on his first title, Edwards wrecked while blocking fellow contender Joey Logano on a restart Sunday night.

Logano turned Edwards sideways and sent him sliding across traffic at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Kasey Kahne slammed into Edwards' rear bumper, lifting the No. 19 Toyota off the ground. Edwards spun, hit the outside wall and came to a stop on the track. Edwards climbed out, stood on the banking — not too far from his wrecked race car — and watched a replay on a big screen.

Edwards shook his head and muttered "damn" as he realized he essentially caused the melee.

"I couldn't go to bed tonight and think that I gave him that lane," Edwards said.

The move cost Edwards and Logano.

"I don't blame him," Logano said. "He had to throw the block. It's the only move I had. I'm not going to look back at it and second guess that move. I had to do that. That's the only play I had. ... I understand why he had to throw the block and he understands why I had to make the move because that was for the win."

"That was the only shot that I had. That was for the race win. It's 10 to go. What do you expect? It's for a championship."

Edwards handled the loss with so much class that several colleagues celebrated him for it. He finished 34th.

Edwards brushed off a request to take an ambulance ride to the infield care center, instead making the trip on foot. He stopped by Logano's pit stall, chatted with crew chief Todd Gordon and shook hands with everyone up there.

Brady tosses 4 TDs as Pats top 49ers

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Tom Brady threw for 280 yards and four touchdowns as the New England Patriots beat San Francisco 30-17 on Sunday in Brady's first road game against the 49ers team he supported as a boy.

Brady found Danny Amendola for a 5-yard touchdown to start the fourth quarter then hit Malcolm Mitchell on a 56-yard score for his fourth TD pass.

Brady also threw short touchdown passes to Julian Edelman and James White on his first two possessions and completed 24 of 40 passes. The AFC East-leading Patriots (8-2) bounced back from last week's loss to the Seahawks on a rainy day at Levi's Stadium.

Redskins 42, Packers 24: Kirk Cousins went deep late and often, throwing for 375 yards and three touchdowns to lead host Washington past free-falling Green Bay.

Cousins and the Redskins (6-3-1) have won six of their past eight games going into a Thanksgiving showdown with the NFC East-leading Dallas Cowboys, the winners of nine in a row. The Packers (4-6) have lost four consecutive games, allowing 30 or more points in all of those defeats.

Aaron Rodgers was 26 of 41 for 355 yards and three touchdowns but couldn't keep up with what his defense gave up. Washington gained 517 yards and converted on 64 percent of its third-down attempts.

Seahawks 26, Eagles 15: Russell Wilson threw for 272 yards and a touchdown and caught a 15-yard touchdown pass from Doug Baldwin as Seattle rolled past visiting Philadelphia.

Wilson became the first quarterback in franchise history to catch a touchdown, a perfect end-around pass from Baldwin to Seattle's athletic QB as he ran down the left sideline and dove into the end zone to give the Seahawks (6-2-1) a 23-7 lead.

Wilson was already causing headaches for the Eagles (5-4)

well before his TD catch. He scrambled and threw across his body to find Jimmy Graham on a 35-yard catch-and-run touchdown in the second quarter as Seattle built a 16-7 halftime lead that was more than enough. Rookie C.J. Prosise had a 72-yard touchdown run on Seattle's fifth offensive play — the longest run ever by a Seattle player since CenturyLink Field opened in 2002.

Dolphins 14, Rams 10: DeVante Parker caught a 9-yard touchdown pass from Ryan Tannehill with 36 seconds to play as Miami rallied for two late scores to spoil Jared Goff's NFL debut with a victory over host Los Angeles.

Tannehill passed for 172 yards in the fifth straight victory for the Dolphins (6-4), who were dominated by the Rams' defense until their final two drives on a rainy day at the Coliseum.

After Jarvis Landry caught a 10-yard TD pass with 4:02 to play, the Dolphins got the ball right back and drove downfield for Parker's diving TD reception in the corner.

Goff went 17 of 31 for 134 yards in a quiet debut by the NFL's No. 1 pick in the Rams' 10th game of the season.

Steelers 24, Browns 9: Le'Veon Bell scored on a 1-yard touchdown run long after time expired in the first half as visiting Pittsburgh had eight sacks to snap a four-game losing streak with a victory over winless Cleveland.

The Steelers (5-5) scored eight points with zeroes showing on the clock before halftime after they were awarded two extra plays because of defensive penalties against the Browns (0-11).

Steelers defensive tackle Javon Hargrave recovered a fumble by QB Josh McCown for a TD with 3:36 left to seal Pittsburgh's win while Bell finished with a season-high 146 yards rushing.

Cowboys 27, Ravens 17: Dak Prescott threw three touchdown passes, including two to Dez Bryant, in the first game with Tony Romo as his

backup as host Dallas set a franchise season record with its ninth straight win.

The Cowboys (9-1) marched 92 and 88 yards on their first two drives of the second half to break a 10-10 tie. Both drives ended with TD passes to Bryant, who had six catches for 80 yards.

Vikings 30, Cardinals 24: Xavier Rhodes returned one of his two interceptions 100 yards for a touchdown and Cordarrelle Patterson took the second-half kickoff 104 yards for a score as host Minnesota stopped its four-game losing streak.

The Vikings (6-4) used those momentum-shifting plays they'd been missing to hold onto a first-place tie with Detroit in the NFC North, with a rematch against the Lions looming in four days. After fueling a 5-0 start with four return touchdowns, the Vikings didn't produce any over their last four games.

David Johnson rushed for 103 yards and a score and tacked on 57 yards and a touchdown receiving, but the Cardinals (4-5-1) fell further into the background of the NFC playoff picture with four more road games remaining.

Buccaneers 19, Chiefs 17: Jameis Winston sliced up a Kansas City defense missing top cornerback Marcus Peters as host Tampa Bay snapped the Chiefs' five-game winning streak.

Winston threw for 331 yards to help set up four field goals by Roberto Aguayo and hit tight end Robert Cross for a touchdown with just over six minutes left to give the Buccaneers (5-5) a cushion.

The Chiefs (7-3) marched swiftly downfield and Alex Smith hit Albert Wilson with a short touchdown pass with just over two minutes left. But their defense couldn't stop Mike Evans on third-and-3 just moments later, and the big wide receiver's sixth reception gave the Buccaneers a first down.

Bills 16, Bengals 12: LeSean McCoy ran 7 yards for a touchdown before suffering a

thumb injury, for Buffalo (5-5), which had lost three straight heading into their bye week.

Playing their first game in nearly a month at Paul Brown Stadium, the Bengals (3-6-1) also lost receiver A.J. Green to an injured right hamstring on the first pass of the game; he was taken off on a cart.

Buffalo's defense clinched it by knocking down Andy Dalton's desperation pass into the end zone on the final play. The Bengals managed only five first downs while being shut out in the second half.

Giants 22, Bears 16: Eli Manning threw a go-ahead 15-yard touchdown pass to rookie Sterling Shepard in the third quarter as host New York rallied for its fifth straight win.

Manning (21 of 36 for 227) also threw a third-quarter touchdown to Will Tye, Rashad Jennings scored on a 2-yard run and Robbie Gould kicked a 46-yard field goal on a day he missed two extra points at a windy MetLife Stadium.

The Giants (7-3) got a second-half shutout from their defense and a clinching interception from Landon Collins as injuries on the offensive line finally caught up with the Bears (2-8) and left Jay Cutler under constant pressure.

Colts 24, Titans 17: Andrew Luck led Indianapolis to a big early lead and the defense held on in the second half as the host Colts (5-5) won back-to-back games for the first time this season to climb into second place in the AFC South.

Luck was 15 of 28 for 262 yards with two touchdowns and one interception as the Colts scored touchdowns on each of their first three possessions.

Lions 26, Jaguars 19: Eric Ebron had a go-ahead 1-yard touchdown run early in the fourth quarter. Ebron's first carry of his career, a handoff as he went from left to right after lining up as an off-the-line tight end, was set up by his career-long, 61-yard catch.

The Lions (6-4) have won five of six despite trailing in the fourth quarter of every game.

Spartans benefit from error vs. FGC

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — The horn went off too soon, and Michigan State hung on.

Eron Harris had a season-high 31 points and the 13th-ranked Spartans held off Florida Gulf Coast 78-77 on Sunday night when a timekeeping error led to a disputed finish.

With 1.6 seconds remaining, Florida Gulf Coast's Christian Terrell threw a long inbounds pass from underneath his own basket. But the clock incorrectly started when the pass was thrown, rather than when Antravious Simmons caught the ball by the foul line at the other end of the court.

So as Simmons turned to try a game-winning shot, the buzzer sounded — much too early. Simmons missed his attempt, but FGCU players looked confused and coach Joe Dooley sought an explanation.

Officials went to a video review as players and fans waited to find out if the game was indeed over.

"Since a timing error occurred, we are able to utilize the replay monitor," referee Bo Boroski told a pool reporter. "Using a stopwatch, it was determined the ball was caught and released in 1.3 seconds, meaning if the shot would have gone in, it would have counted. After the miss there was no time remaining in the game, therefore ending the game. By rule the possession cannot

be replayed."

After the game, Dooley said he understood the ruling.

Harris made all six of his three-pointers and Miles Bridges added 13 points for the Spartans (2-2), who shot a season-best 51 percent from the floor. They hit 52.9 percent of their attempts from beyond the three-point line, but struggled at the free throw line (57.6 percent).

"It's hard to be honest and mad and happy at the same time," Michigan State coach Tom Izzo said. "We got to the free throw line 33 times. Twenty-one assists on 25 baskets was very, very good. We improved in some areas, but I thought we got outplayed. The biggest thing this program has stood for has been toughness, but I told our players they were the tougher team."

No. 1 Duke 75, No. 21 Rhode Island 65: At Uncasville, Conn., Luke Kennard scored 24 points and Duke beat Rhode Island in the Hall of Fame Tip-Off title game.

No. 2 Kentucky 93, Duquesne 59: De'Aaron Fox scored 16 points, Malik Monk added 14 and host Kentucky took a step toward the nation's top ranking by rolling past Duquesne.

No. 3 Villanova 67, UCF 57: Josh Hart scored 11 of his 15 points in the second half and Villanova stared down UCF and 7-foot-6 center Tacko Fall to win the Charleston

Classic.

No. 8 Virginia 62, Yale 38: Marial Shayok scored 15 points and host Virginia held Yale scoreless for a stretch of nearly 9 minutes in the second half.

No. 11 Xavier 67, N. Iowa 59: Trevon Bluiett scored 20 points and Edmond Sumner had 11 of his 17 points in the second half to help Xavier win the Tire Pros Invitational.

No. 16 UCLA 114, Long Beach State 77: T.J. Leaf scored 21 points, fellow freshman Lonzo Ball added 20 and host UCLA cruised past Long Beach State.

No. 19 West Virginia 100, New Hampshire 41: Esa Ahmad tied a career-high with 14 points, Nathan Adrian added 12 and host West Virginia routed New Hampshire.

No. 20 Iowa State 130, The Citadel 63: Monte Morris had 17 points, 10 rebounds, 10 assists for the fifth triple-double in Iowa State history and the host Cyclones set a program record for points in a game.

No. 22 Creighton 112, N.C. State 94: Cole Huff had 20 points and 10 rebounds, helping Creighton beat N.C. State to the Paradise Jam title game.

No. 24 Cincinnati 71, Penn State 50: Kyle Washington had 16 points and 17 rebounds and Cincinnati won the Hall of Fame Tip-Off consolation game.

Panthers get by Lundqvist

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Aleksander Barkov emptied out his bag of tricks trying to beat Henrik Lundqvist in a shootout.

Barkov tapped the puck off his skate, made a big deke to his forehand and then tried to reach way back with one arm for a backhand shot.

He got the winner, but only by a matter of luck — and about an inch.

Barkov and Vincent Trochek scored in the shootout, lifting the Florida Panthers over the New York Rangers 3-2 on Sunday night.

Barkov took his unconventional approach at Lundqvist knowing a goal would win the game. Lundqvist got his stick on the puck while Barkov tried going to the backhand, but it skipped over the paddle and trickled toward the goal line.

Lundqvist dove desperately as the puck approached the line, but his glove didn't swat it away until after it had fully entered the cage.

Blue Jackets 3, Capitals 2: At Washington, Alexander Wennberg's last-minute power play goal gave Columbus its fourth straight win.

Kings 3, Ducks 2: Jeff Carter scored twice and got his 600th career point while Peter Budaj made 28 saves as visiting Los Angeles beat Anaheim.

Flames 3, Red Wings 2: Mikael Backlund scored with 7:46 left in the third period to give visiting Calgary a victory over slumping Detroit.

Hurricanes 3, Jets 1: Victor Rask got his eighth goal of the season and 19-year-old Noah Hanifin scored his first to help host Carolina beat Winnipeg for its fourth straight win.

Pacers earn road win

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Jeff Teague scored eight of his 30 points in overtime as the Indiana Pacers beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 115-111 on Sunday night for their first road victory of the season.

Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook had his fifth triple-double of the season — as many as the rest of the NBA combined — with 31 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds but went 13-for-34 from the field.

Teague matched his season scoring high and added nine assists and six steals. He hit two free throws with 4.6 seconds left in regulation to put the Pacers up three.

Knicks 104, Hawks 94: Carmelo Anthony matched his season high with 31 points as New York beat Atlanta for its

fourth straight home victory.

Trail Blazers 129, Nets 109: C.J. McCollum scored 33 points and Evan Turner had 19 as Portland beat host Brooklyn.

Bulls 118, Lakers 110: Jimmy Butler scored a season-high 40 points and Isaiah Canaan added a season-high 17 as visiting Chicago beat Los Angeles for its fifth victory in six games.

Kings 102, Raptors 99: Rudy Gay had 23 points and nine rebounds as host Sacramento beat Toronto after waiting out a video review to see if the Raptors had forced overtime on Terrence Ross' three-pointer at the buzzer.

Nuggets 105, Jazz 91: Jusuf Nurkic had 16 points and 11 rebounds as Denver won a home game for the second time this season, beating Utah.