

Kabul mosque attack 1st since US pullout

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — At least five civilians were killed in a bomb blast outside a Kabul mosque Sunday, a Taliban official said. It was the deadliest attack in the Afghan capital since U.S. forces left at the end of August.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but suspicion fell on Islamic State extremists who have stepped up attacks on the Taliban in recent weeks, particularly in an ISIS stronghold in eastern Afghanistan.

An apparent roadside bomb went off at the gate of the sprawling Eid Gah Mosque in Kabul at a time when a memo-

rial service was being held for the mother of chief Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid. Five people were killed, said Qari Saeed Khosti, the spokesman of the Interior Ministry.

The explosion underscored the growing challenges the Taliban face just weeks after they took control of Afghanistan in a blitz campaign, culminating in their takeover of Kabul on Aug. 15.

During their 20-year insurgency, the Taliban themselves had frequently carried out bombing and shooting attacks, but are now faced with trying to contain rival militants using the same methods. The grow-

ing security challenges come at a time of an economic meltdown, as the Taliban struggle to run the country without the massive foreign aid given to U.S.-backed government they toppled.

Three suspects were arrested in Sunday's explosion in Kabul, said Bilal Karimi, a Taliban spokesman. He said Taliban fighters were not harmed.

The area around the mosque was cordoned off by the Taliban, who maintained a heavy security presence. Later in the afternoon the site was cleaned. The only sign of the blast was slight damage to the ornamental arch by the entrance gate.

While attacks in Kabul have

so far been rare, ISIS militants have stepped up attacks against the Taliban since their mid-August takeover, and in recent weeks have shown signs of expanding beyond the east and closer toward the capital.

ISIS maintains a strong presence in the eastern province of Nangarhar, where it has claimed responsibility for several killings in the provincial capital of Jalalabad.

In late August, an ISIS suicide bomber targeted American evacuation efforts at Kabul's international airport. The blast killed 169 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members and was one of the deadliest attacks in the country in years.

SEAL leads naval forces in S. Korea

BY DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

A Navy special warfare officer and former operations director for the Joint Special Operations Command has taken charge of U.S. naval assets in the Korean Peninsula.

Rear Adm. Mark Schafer, a Navy SEAL, became the latest commander of U.S. Naval Forces Korea on Wednesday, relieving Rear Adm. Buzz Donnelly.

"I am excited and honored to be carrying on the legacy of this command and its rich history that dates back to its establishment in July 1957," Schafer said during the ceremony at the headquarters of South Korea's navy, according to a press release. "The superiority of the combined team is a testament to Rear Adm. Donnelly's leadership."

Marine pilots test Japan's warship ability

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Marine Corps aviators are preparing to fly two of their F-35B Lightning II fighters from the Japanese flattop JS Izumo, a test of the warship's newly acquired ability to carry the stealthy aircraft.

Plans to land and launch the short-takeoff, vertical-landing F-35s from the Izumo were announced Thursday by the Defense Ministry, although they'd been signaled by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger during a security dialogue last month.

The drills are scheduled to happen between Sunday and Thursday in the Pacific Ocean and involve jets from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, the ministry said in its announcement. The Izumo arrived at the coastal air station on Thursday.

MCAS Iwakuni, about 50

miles south of Hiroshima, is home to two F-35B squadrons, Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 and Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 242.

The aircraft landing on the Izumo will be from VMFA-242, known as the "Bats," according to 1st Marine Aircraft Wing spokesman Maj. Ken Kunze.

Marine aircraft controllers and public affairs staff are already on the Izumo ahead of the operation, he said in a telephone interview Friday.

"It's a demonstration for the Japanese as they begin to accept F-35Bs and they begin carrier operations," he said. "This is ... landing on the Izumo and showing that it is capable of handling them."

The ship, commissioned in 2015 as a helicopter carrier, had heat-resistant coating added to its deck this year, enabling it to support F-35B vertical landings.

Its sister ship, the JS Kaga, is scheduled for a similar makeover ahead of Japan's acquisition of 42 F-35Bs, which are slated to arrive sometime in the next five years. U.S. CV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft made their first-ever landing on the Kaga during the Keen Sword drills off Japan's coast in October 2020.

Japan already operates the F-35A, a conventional takeoff-and-landing version of aircraft, from Misawa Air Base in the country's northeast.

Japan's return to carrier operations for the first time since World War II comes as China builds its own fleet of flattops. Beijing launched its first carrier, the Liaoning, in 2012 and a second, the Shandong, in 2017.

A third carrier, similar in size to the Navy's USS Gerald R. Ford, is under construction in Shanghai, Naval News reported April. 15.

'Black Hawk Down' Rangers get Silver Stars

By **COREY DICKSTEIN**
Stars and Stripes

FORT BENNING, Ga. — During 23 years in the Army — much of it in the elite ranks of the 75th Ranger Regiment — Jeff Struecker saw combat in Panama, Iraq and Afghanistan, but nothing compared to the infamous October 1993 gunfight through the streets of Mogadishu.

"I'd been to combat a couple of times before Somalia and a lot of times after, but I've never seen heroism, I've never seen fighting, like we saw among these guys on the streets of Mogadishu, Somalia," said Struecker, one of 18 veterans who fought in the battle officially known as Operation Gothic Serpent and awarded the Silver Star for valor Friday. "Nothing came close to Somalia. I mean not even close."

The Silver Stars presented in a ceremony at Fort Benning, Ga., for those who were serving 28 years ago in the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment were upgrades of Bronze Star medals with combat "V" for valor that the Rangers were presented months after returning from Somalia. The Battle of Mogadishu, in which 18 American soldiers were killed, was later made famous by the best-selling book "Black Hawk Down" and the movie of the same name.

For Struecker, the honor was "bittersweet" and unexpected. He said others who fought in that battle were more deserving of the Silver Star, the nation's third-highest honor for battlefield heroics. He said he was particularly proud to see some of the other troops from that fight honored.

"It's truly an honor," said Sean Watson, a sergeant first class at the time who would go on to retire as a command sergeant major in 2015. "I believe

that being an awardee is actually a representation of everybody in the position I was in. They earned it — they're the ones who really earned this."

The Army announced in July that 60 veterans of the battle — mostly Army special operators, many of whom have not been named publicly — would receive award upgrades for their actions in the fight. That includes 58 Silver Stars and two Distinguished Flying Crosses. Award ceremonies are planned for other units in the future, Army officials said Friday.

The fight

The battle broke out as American special operators — primarily Rangers, and other elite soldiers from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment and 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta, or Delta Force — set out to capture two top lieutenants of warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, who was responsible for attacks on U.N. peacekeeping troops working to end civil war in Somalia.

The assault force was inserted into the city by helicopter, and another element was to follow that group into the city in Humvees, according to the Army, which said many elements of the battle remain classified despite the enormous attention it has received publicly.

Struecker, then a staff sergeant with the Rangers' 3rd Battalion, was leading a squad assigned as the ground reaction force to support the helicopter-borne troops entering Aidid's stronghold in the Bakara Market. The helicopter assault force went in first to search for the warlord's henchmen and the ground force came into the market later, according to the Army's description of the battle.

It was the Rangers' seventh mission in Somalia, but this one,

Struecker said, was in broad daylight in a well-defended part of Mogadishu with an unknown number of enemy fighters.

"This is the middle of bad-guy territory, and we're kicking down the door and walking into the heart of it," he said. "You know as soon as you get in it's going to be a fight, and it's going to be a fight the whole time that you're in there, and it's going to be a fight until you get out. All of us knew that. What I don't think anyone anticipated was the sheer numbers."

That U.S. force of less than 200 operators would find itself in a fight with some 10,000 to 12,000 well-armed Somali fighters. After the assault force nabbed Aidid's aides, militants attacked the troops and shot down two MH-60 Black Hawk helicopters with rocket-propelled grenades — something the Army had never seen before, officials said.

It set off a frantic mission to secure the locations of the downed Black Hawks and recover wounded and fallen Americans. U.S. special operators would spend 18 hours running and fighting their way through the city's streets, according to the Army.

Struecker, 52, led his ground unit through the city three times as the battle raged. Their Humvees were "like bullet magnets," he recalled. His Silver Star citation credits him with repeatedly sacrificing "his own personal safety" to help other soldiers.

Dominick Pilla, a sergeant and machine gunner, was just behind Struecker when he was shot and killed — the first American death in the battle. His Silver Star citation credits Pilla with "suppressing numerous enemy positions while under fire himself." His heroics, it added, saved "the lives of all the

other Rangers" with him at the time. He was 21.

Meanwhile, Watson — a platoon sergeant at the time who had entered the fight by helicopter — moved his force toward one of the downed Black Hawks, fighting their way through the city. His Silver Star citation credited him with securing the crash site from enemy forces "until reinforcements came the next morning."

It was brutal work, Watson said. But he was awed by the actions of the Rangers and others around him.

"It was something to behold ... to watch what was going on — the way they performed," he said. "It was beyond compare."

The fallout

Three of the four pilots in the downed Black Hawks would die, and the fourth was captured and later released.

Two Delta Force operators — Master Sgt. Gary Gordon and Sgt. 1st Class Randy Shughart — were posthumously awarded Medals of Honor for their actions to secure the site of one of the Black Hawk crashes to recover survivors. Both of those operators were among the U.S. dead in the fight.

In all, 73 U.S. troops were injured in the battle, according to the Army. The botched mission left a long-lasting mark on American foreign policy after television news broadcast images of a U.S. soldier's body dragged through Mogadishu's streets as locals cheered.

The defense secretary at the time, Les Aspin, would resign his post in wake of the battle. Ultimately, then-President Bill Clinton elected to end the mission to capture Aidid and he removed all U.S. forces from Somalia by March 1994. U.S. troops would not return to the country until 2007.

Destroyer USS Levin christened in Maine

The Detroit News

DETROIT — The destroyer named for the late Sen. Carl Levin was christened at a port in Maine on Saturday morning by the ship's sponsors, Levin's three daughters.

The ceremony came two months after Levin's death at age 87 in late July. Levin, a Detroit Democrat, was Michigan's longest-serving senator, spending 36 years in office and 10 years as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"For the United States of America, I christen thee Carl Levin. May God bless this ship and all who sail in her," said Levin's daughters, Kate Levin Markel, Laura Levin and Erica Levin,

moments before each shattered a champagne bottle over the ship as part of the traditional launching ceremony.

More than 100 guests and the crew of the ship attended the 90-minute ceremony, including Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, who called Levin a dedicated public servant whom she cherished for 36 years in Senate.

"We are here to celebrate the christening of a great ship and a great namesake," Collins said. "It is fitting that the ships of the U.S. Navy bear the names of those who display uncommon dedication to our nation. Today that name Carl Levin joins that illustrious roster."

Retired Rep. Sander Levin,

Carl's brother, spoke at the event, saying it was an emotional moment for the family.

"Our hope is in the years and years to come, that this ship will help us to remember him and also as it sails the seas, honor all that made Carl a remarkable public servant and a glorious human being," Levin said.

The USS Carl M. Levin launched over three days in May, built by General Dynamics at Bath Iron Works in Maine. An Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer, the ship is about 510 feet long, weighs 7,500 tons and can travel at a speed of over 30 knots.

The boat had been scheduled to be christened July 24, but the

ceremony was postponed during the final weeks of Levin's life.

"Being the namesake of this great ship really was the highlight of our dad's career," Markel said. "Dad's connection to this ship, its leaders and its growing crew kept his spirits high through his last days."

In 2016, Levin told reporters at the ship's naming ceremony in Detroit that the announcement caught him off guard and brought him to tears.

"I did not expect it. I didn't seek it," Levin said at the time. "It's such an honor for me to be connected with the men and women who put on our uniform. It's too difficult to describe any other way than overwhelming."

Yokosuka issues M18, replacing Beretta M9

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — U.S. sailors and Japanese security personnel checked out new 9 mm handguns at this base south of Tokyo on Friday morning, ending nearly four decades of service with Beretta M9 pistols.

As part of a servicewide transition, security officers have been training with the SIG Sauer M18 pistol, which is replacing the M9. The Navy adopted the M9 in 1985, according to Yokosuka's head of security, Lt. Cmdr. Roel Rosalez.

At Yokosuka, the transition meant more than 31,000 rounds fired by approximately 350 security officers as they became certified to use the new sidearm over the course of nearly a month.

"For a single person, it's roughly about 12 to 16 hours [of training] from beginning to end," Petty Officer 1st Class Gasper Peña told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday. "It took us approximately two weeks to accomplish

all of the actual training and evolutions, and then an additional two weeks on the administrative side."

Peña, an armory supervisor at Yokosuka, said the Navy has been transitioning toward the M18 for nearly a decade, a process that was delayed because the pistols initially lacked certain features, such as an external safety catch.

"We're talking 10 years ago; that's literally when I joined the Navy," Peña said. "Ten years later, we finally got them, and it's a really, really good weapon system."

Yokosuka is likely the first Navy installation outside of the United States to put the new weapons into service, according to Rosalez and Peña.

Other installations in Japan are in "various stages of the transition to M18s," Cmdr. Katie Cerezo, spokeswoman for Naval Forces Japan, said in an email Friday. She could not comment on specifics, however, "as a matter of policy."

In-person education guidance shut down for sailors overseas

Stars and Stripes

The Navy College Program, which enables students to receive academic credits for regular work and training, has permanently shut down in-person counseling at overseas offices, according to a program statement.

The change finalizes a shift to providing sailor counseling online during the coronavirus pandemic through the Navy College Virtual Education Center, the statement said.

"Sailors interested in pursuing off-duty educational opportunities will continue to have a wide array of virtual services available to them," Lt. Cmdr. Adam Walski, Navy Voluntary Education director, said in the Sept. 27 statement. "More importantly, services will not be interrupted for those in need of education assistance or counseling in any location worldwide."

The Navy had closed its last four physical offices stateside in 2017, after closing 16 offices the year before and 20 in 2009.

Navy officials said in 2017 that the closures would save \$2.3

million. The services, however, had kept the college offices outside the continental United States open.

Offices now providing virtual services include Naval Station Rota in Spain, and Naval Air Station Sigonella and Naval Support Activity Naples, both in Italy. The change also affects offices in Bahrain; Misawa, Yokosuka, Atsugi, Sasebo and Okinawa, all in Japan; Guam; Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Academic institutions already on Navy bases within and outside the U.S. remain in place, the statement said.

Virtual services include call-in and live chat with counselors from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern time. There is also an automated chatbot on the Navy College website, or people may leave a question or request a counselor to call back using Issue Tracker in MyNavy Education.

All virtual education center customers will now use the MyNavy Career Center toll-free number, 1-833-330-MNCC, the statement said.

N. Korea performs 4th anti-aircraft test

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea claimed to have launched a new anti-aircraft missile Thursday, its fourth missile test in recent weeks, as its leaders signaled peaceful overtures amid frozen relations.

The new surface-to-air missile displayed “remarkable combat performance” through “new key technologies,” the state-run Korean Central News Agency reported Friday.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un did not appear to have inspected the test, according to the report.

South Korea’s military, which typically gives details of significant missile tests shortly after

they are conducted by the North, said it was aware of the latest launch but did not provide further insight.

North Korea’s production of surface-to-air missiles is not a novel development; it has tested the missiles in the past decade and claimed they were successful.

At least three other missile variations were launched by North Korea in recent weeks. The communist regime in separate tests last month fired a ballistic missile from a train, launched long-range cruise missiles capable of reaching Japan, and test-fired a hypersonic short-range missile off its eastern coast.

The latest test comes one day after Kim said the inter-Korean

communication lines would reopen by early October. The lines were reinstated in July after an extended pause but were again severed after two weeks in an apparent protest to joint U.S.-South Korean military drills.

In a statement through KCNA on Thursday, Kim said the restoration of the hotline was an effort “for realizing the expectations and desire of the entire Korean nation to see the earlier recovery of the North-South relations.”

His sister, Kim Yo Jong, relayed the same sentiment in a separate statement last month but added that the United States and South Korea needed to quit their “hostile policies” against her country.

In her statement, Kim de-

scribed the notion of formally ending the 1950-53 Korean War as a “good idea,” but noted that the declaration would be meaningless if the current “conflicted relationships and antagonistic relations” continued on the peninsula.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, who has advocated for formally putting an end to the Korean War throughout his presidency, urged the two countries to “come together” in a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in September.

The Koreans remain at war following the signing of an armistice agreement, rather than a peace treaty. Roughly 28,500 U.S. troops are currently stationed in the South.

COVID limits relaxed at US Naval Station Rota in Spain

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

With Spain’s COVID-19 infection rate falling significantly, U.S. Naval Station Rota is easing restrictions and no longer requiring vaccinated travelers to quarantine, the base announced.

Quarantine will now be required only for unvaccinated travelers of any age who came from or through a country with a 14-day incidence rate higher than 480 cases per 100,000 residents, the base said on its Facebook page. Those countries currently include Great Britain, Serbia, Slovenia and the United States.

As of Thursday, people at NS Rota’s fitness center no longer had to wear a mask except when walking through the center or spotting a workout partner using free weights.

Mask wearing was previously required in all cases other than while using cardio equipment, according to an online post Wednesday.

Marines coordinate strikes with Navy aircraft carrier for first time

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CENTRAL TRAINING AREA, Okinawa — The Marine Corps has taken a big step in developing the commandant’s island-fighting doctrine by coordinating simulated air and surface strikes with sailors aboard an aircraft carrier.

Exercise Noble Jaguar began Sept. 28 and involved approximately 60 Marines from the 3rd Marine Division, 12th Marine Regiment, rocket crews from 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines and the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, regiment operations officer Lt. Col. Joshua Montero told Stars and Stripes at Camp Hansen on Thursday.

For the first time, Navy planners and intelligence officers from the USS Carl Vinson joined the staff at 3rd Marine Division headquarters for the exercise. Meanwhile, the nearby carrier’s crew took part in the communications exercise alongside other units of the 7th Fleet.

“We’ll have a Navy or Marine aircraft up in the air, find a target, communicate that, sometimes through the Navy, sometimes through the Air Force,” Montero said. “And then eventually at our level, we’ll have all of the missiles come on to the same [target], so we’re combining those strikes together.”

The exercise, which was slated to end Friday, began with the loading and offloading of two M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, from the expeditionary fast transport ship USNS Brunswick, Capt. Nathanael Wasik, the HIMARS platoon commander, said Thursday.

The platoon headed into the Central Training Area and set up a concealed fire direction center under camouflage netting to coordinate strikes against air, land and sea targets.

Marines dispersed to make themselves difficult to target. They had to sustain themselves for several days with a limited amount of food, water and fuel.

All of this was part of the Corps’ new island-fighting doctrine, known as expeditionary advanced base operations, Wasik said.

Commandant Gen. David Berger introduced the doctrine in July 2019. It calls for Marines to move inside the range of an adversary’s “long-range precision fires” and establish difficult-to-target forward bases.

This doctrine translates to seizing and holding territory, refueling, rearming and relaunching aircraft, supporting naval units at sea and denying sea lanes to the adversary.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ex-officer accused of stealing guns from work

NC NORTH TOPSAIL BEACH — A former North Carolina police officer has been accused of stealing guns from the police department where he worked, authorities said.

In a news release, the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation said former North Topsail Beach police officer Mark William Ray Jr., 41, is charged with 15 counts of obtaining property by false pretense, embezzlement, and felony conversion, according to an agency news release.

The SBI said the North Topsail police chief asked the agency to investigate suspected thefts of several firearms being held as evidence at the police department. Agents determined that the guns were sold or pawned at local pawn shops.

Man sentenced for theft of lawmakers' IDs

FL ORLANDO — A Florida man has been sentenced to six years and five months in prison for stealing the identities of local, state and federal officials in a case involving more than \$50,000 in fraudulent payments, authorities said.

Michael T. Watters, 51, of Ocoee, was sentenced in Orlando federal court, according to court records.

According to court documents, Watters created approximately 35 counterfeit driver licenses using the stolen identities of current and former lawmakers. Between December 2018 and May 2019, Watters used those counterfeit licenses to pass about 265 counterfeit checks as payment at various stores in the Orlando area.

Prosecutors said Watters

caused total losses of \$53,156.43 to the affected businesses.

Council member pleads guilty to accepting bribes

MI DETROIT — A member of the Detroit City Council pleaded guilty to conspiracy, admitting that he and an aide accepted nearly \$36,000 in bribes related to oversight of towing.

Andre Spivey, 47, took the money from an undercover agent or an informant. He's expected to resign from office.

"Over the course of four years, I received payments in hopes to help an individual retain a city contract," Spivey told U.S. District Judge Victoria Roberts.

The city council is considering changes to how the city hires towing companies by turning to competitive bids.

Neighborhood troubled by e-scooters everywhere

IN EVANSVILLE — Members of an Evansville neighborhood group are getting fed up with electric scooter "litter" and are asking city officials to help with answers.

Old Evansville Historic Association co-president Chuck Hudson said each morning he has to remove e-scooters from the sidewalk outside his home, the Evansville Courier & Press reported.

"I feel like it's my responsibility to make sure it's safe, and of course there are liability issues if I know they're there and I don't do anything about it," Hudson said.

Resident Jeff Hayden said: "Right now, we consider them mechanical litter."

Riders are not required to leave scooters in any specific location in Evansville, but a 2019 city council ordinance does pro-

hibit them from being placed in curb ramps, driveways, near fire hydrants or emergency boxes and crosswalk entries, according to the newspaper.

Some in the neighborhood group suggest geofencing just outside the historic district to stop the scooters once they zip inside the restricted area and revoking licenses of scooter companies.

Report: Jet was slower than usual before crash

CT FARMINGTON — A small jet that crashed into a building in Connecticut, killing four people, was going slower than usual as it took off from an airport runway, while witnesses saw a puff of smoke and noticed the aircraft was having trouble gaining altitude, according to a preliminary investigation report.

The report by the National Transportation Safety Board also said the plane's parking brake was found to be on, although it was not clear when it was activated.

The report did not say what may have caused the Sept. 2 crash in Farmington, which remains under investigation.

The twin-engine Cessna 560XL was to have flown from Robertson Airport in Plainville to Dare County Regional Airport in Manteo, N.C. But it crashed into a manufacturing building shortly after takeoff and burst into flames, authorities said.

County chooses new site for Confederate tribute

MS GREENWOOD — Supervisors in one Mississippi county have chosen a new site for a Confederate monument after more than a year of discussion, but the site will need

state approval and it's unclear how much the move will cost.

The stone monument with multiple Confederate soldiers has stood since 1913 outside the Leflore County Courthouse in Greenwood, and it's one of about 50 Confederate monuments on public property in Mississippi. The majority-Black Leflore County supervisors voted in June 2020 to move it to a less prominent spot — a decision made amid international protests over racial injustice after police in Minneapolis killed a Black man, George Floyd.

Supervisors voted to move the monument to Fort Pemberton Memorial Park, the Greenwood Commonwealth reported.

Sheriff's deputy charged over gun threats

CA SAN FRANCISCO — An off-duty San Francisco sheriff's deputy is facing criminal prosecution after authorities said he threatened to shoot partygoers at a potluck, damaged furnishings and grabbed a teen in an inappropriate manner.

San Francisco's district attorney, Chesa Boudin, announced that his office charged Dominic Barsetti, 32, with four counts of felony criminal threats, one count of misdemeanor vandalism and one count of misdemeanor sexual battery.

Witnesses said Barsetti inappropriately grabbed an 18-year-old and pulled her hair. When confronted by fellow party attendees, authorities said the deputy picked up a guitar and swung it around, ripped down a curtain, damaged a bookcase, and broke a tank containing a large lizard. He then threatened to get his gun and shoot people there.

— From wire reports

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No drama for No. 1 Alabama, No. 2 Georgia

Associated Press

No. 1 Alabama and No. 2 Georgia are not here for the chaos.

On another college football Saturday sprinkled with surprises, including three top-15 teams losing to unranked opponents, the Crimson Tide and Bulldogs left no doubt about who are the two best teams in the country.

The Crimson Tide buried No. 12 Mississippi by halftime and the Bulldogs were up three touchdowns on No. 8 Arkansas before the first quarter was over.

"I don't want to simplify this, but they just whipped us physically," Arkansas coach Sam Pittman said.

That has been a theme for Georgia.

The Bulldogs have not been threatened since their opener against Clemson. Arkansas was hoping to make a statement after it bullied both Texas and Texas A&M, but Georgia

outclassed the Hogs in just about every way.

And the Bulldogs did it with their backup quarterback. Stetson Bennett started for JT Daniels, but it hardly mattered.

Bennett threw 11 passes. Georgia hammered away with its running game (273 yards on 56 carries) and let its ridiculous defense do the rest.

Arkansas managed 162 yards and nine first downs.

Georgia has shut out consecutive Southeastern Conference opponents for the first time since 1980, the last time the Bulldogs won a national championship.

Alabama turned Lane Kiffin's return to Tuscaloosa into a laugh with a similar approach to Georgia. Instead of getting into a race with Matt Corral and Ole Miss' high-scoring offense, the Tide went old school.

"It started to feel like the classic Alabama pound the football," running back Brian Rob-

inson told reporters.

Robinson carried 36 times for 210 yards and four touchdowns. It was 42-7 Alabama early in the fourth quarter before Ole Miss tacked on a couple of touchdowns.

There was drama filled upsets elsewhere.

Stanford knocked off No. 3 Oregon in overtime. Kentucky beat No. 10 Florida with a late goal-line stand. Mississippi State handed No. 15 Texas A&M its second straight loss, a week before Alabama comes to College Station.

If ever there was a season for a Group of Five team to make a case to be in the College Football Playoff, it might be this year.

And No. 7 Cincinnati might be that team. Desmond Ridder and the Bearcats made themselves right at home at Notre Dame.

Through the first four weeks of the season, 25 ranked teams lost, the most in poll history. By the end of Saturday, nine more had gone down.

Navy scores 17 points in fourth quarter to stun UCF

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Tai Lavatai returned from a two-game injury absence to lead Navy back from a 13-point fourth-quarter deficit and a 34-30 win over Central Florida on Saturday for the Midshipmen's first victory this season.

With Navy trailing 30-27, Diego Fabot knocked the ball out of Brandon Johnson's hands after a 20-yard reception and Taylor Robinson recovered at the Midshipmen 47. Eleven plays and over five minutes later, Isaac Ruoss ran in from the 4-yard line to give Navy the lead with 3:09 left.

UCF quickly went down the field down to the Midshipmen 12, but Robinson, who dropped a would-be interception two plays earlier, came up with a pick in the end zone on fourth down with 24 seconds remaining.

The victory was the first for Navy (1-3, 1-1) in three meetings with the Knights (2-2, 0-1) since joining the American Athletic Conference in 2015, the final league team the Midshipmen were winless against.

Bijan Nichols kicked his sec-

ond field goal and Lavatai, who missed the previous two games, ran for his second touchdown of the game after Navy entered the fourth quarter trailing 30-17.

Lavatai and Ruoss had 21 carries each as the Midshipmen ran for 348 yards led by 85 from Carlinos Acie.

Daniel Taylor recovered a blocked punt in the end zone for a Navy TD in the first half.

UCF freshman Mikey Keene, making his first start in place of the injured Dillon Gabriel, was 16-for-26 passing for 178 yards and two TDs to Johnson.

Air Force 38, New Mexico 10: Brad Roberts ran for 142 yards and scored twice as the Falcons scored on their first four drives to build a big early lead then coasted to a win at New Mexico.

Air Force's defense contributed four takeaways and four sacks — 3½ by Vince Sanford.

The Falcons (4-1, 1-1 Mountain West) limited the Lobos (2-3, 0-1) to 189 total yards, 143 in the second half after Air Force had already pushed its lead to 31-0 early in the third quarter.

DeAndre Hughes ran for 89

and a touchdown for the Falcons.

New Mexico quarterback Terry Wilson Jr. was 13-for-21 for 142 yards and a touchdown pass.

In two games against the Lobos, Roberts has 319 yards on 57 carries and five touchdowns.

"I don't know if it's anything in particular," he said. "The offensive line just does its job and opens up a crease for me and I just try and run as fast as I can. You can see the defense and you can see them huffing and puffing and you know you kind of got 'em where you want 'em. It's my favorite thing to look at them and to know they're tired and that we can keep pounding the rock."

Air Force showed its ground-and-pound offense can control the ball against lesser opponents, but it put the ball on the ground twice and was fortunate to recover both. Bigger and tougher tests await the Falcons.

"We just have to keep getting better," Calhoun said. "We have some really great challenges up in front of us."

Ball State 28, Army 16: Jus-

tin Hall returned the opening kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown, Drew Plitt threw two TD passes and the host Cardinals beat the Black Knights to snap a three-game losing streak.

Plitt was 17-for-28 passing for 233 yards with no interceptions and Hall finished with seven receptions for 78 yards.

After Hall's kickoff return, Army was stopped short on a fourth-and-2 and on the next play, Plitt hit Jayshon Jackson down the right sideline for a 44-yard touchdown and Carson Steele added a 2-yard TD run to give Ball State (2-3) a 21-0 lead with 4:48 left in the first quarter.

Tyhier Tyler scored on a 4-yard run early in the second quarter and added a 2-yard touchdown run just before halftime to trim the deficit to 21-14 but the Black Knights (4-1) would get no closer.

Plitt connected with Yo'Heinz Tyler on an 18-yard pass that gave the Cardinals a two-touchdown lead midway through the third quarter.

Tyler had 24 carries for 63 yards as Army finished with 36 yards rushing on 26 attempts.

Cincinnati makes statement at Notre Dame

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — The last pass of the day by Desmond Ridder was a celebratory heave way up into stands toward the Cincinnati fans who came to Notre Dame to see their Bearcats make a statement.

Cincinnati wanted to use the first top-10, regular-season matchup in program history as a chance to show it belongs among the nation's best before heading into its American Athletic Conference schedule.

Mission accomplished.

Ridder threw two touchdown passes and ran for score late in the fourth quarter as No. 7 Cincinnati capitalized on its big opportunity and beat the No. 9 Fighting Irish 24-13 on Saturday in a game the Bearcats hope can be the centerpiece of a College Football Playoff resume.

"We didn't just beat a top-10 team, we beat a top-five program," Cincinnati coach Luke Fickell said.

No team from outside the Power Five conferences has reached the playoff in its seven seasons. Never even came close.

To break that barrier, the Bearcats almost certainly need to go undefeated and this trip to Notre Dame (4-1) looked like the toughest test on their schedule. Not to mention the grandest stage they'll appear on this season.

"It's still midseason, so we got a lot of games left to play, but it obviously is a big win

against a top-10 team," Ridder said. "Hopefully, we keep this going."

Cincinnati was not quite dominant, but it was plenty good enough in its first trip to South Bend since 1900 to snap the Fighting Irish's 26-game home winning streak.

"I don't think we let the stage get too big for us," Ridder said.

When told by coaches how loud the crowd can be at Notre Dame Stadium this week, Ridder quipped that it wouldn't be for long.

The senior delivered, going 19-for-32 for 297 yards. He hooked up with Alec Pierce six times for 144 yards, and was at his best after the Irish cut the lead to 17-13 with 8:20 left in the fourth quarter.

Ridder went 3-for-3, with a bullet down the middle for 36 yards to Leonard Taylor, on the ensuing drive. He capped it off with a 6-yard TD run around left end that made it 24-13 with 5:08 left.

"That's the Desmond Ridder factor," Fickell said.

Cincinnati took advantage of three turnovers by the Irish in the first half to jump out to 17-0 lead. The miscues by Notre Dame were killers.

Ahmad Gardner picked off an ill-advised throw under pressure by Jack Coan that ended the Fighting Irish's first and best drive of the half.

DeShawn Pace's interception of Notre

Dame freshman Tyler Buchner set up Cincinnati in the red zone and Ridder flipped a 1-yard pass to Taylor to make it 7-0 early in the second quarter.

Chris Tyree fumbled the ensuing kickoff back to the Bearcats and the Bearcats turned that into a 23-yard field goal by Cole Smith.

Ridder and Cincinnati put together its best first-half drive late in the second quarter, going 80 yards for a touchdown. Ridder found Tre Tucker for a 27-yard score that beat Irish All-America safety Kyle Hamilton.

The Bearcats were up 17-0 with 40 seconds left in the first half and for the third time Cincinnati fans, decked in red in the upper reaches of the south end zone, were chanting "Let's Go Bearcats!"

After the postgame celebration died down, Ridder belted out a "How 'bout them Bearcats!" when he entered the interview room and talked about how it "sounded like a home game."

Notre Dame's Drew Pyne, who took over last week in the second half against Wisconsin when Jack Coan went out with an ankle injury, came off the bench in the third quarter again for the Irish — this time just to provide a spark.

Pyne was 9-for-22 for 143 yards and his 32-yard touchdown pass to Braden Lenzy with 8:20 left in the fourth quarter cut the lead to 17-13.

Stanford blows lead but rallies to stun No. 3 Oregon

Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — Stanford's comeback victory that stunned Oregon was enough of a roller-coaster that coach David Shaw felt the need to apologize to his parents and any other fans older than 70 for the emotional toll.

The Cardinal overcame a blown lead and had their banged-up quarterback stage an improbable rally before finally prevailing over the third-ranked Ducks.

Tanner McKee threw a TD pass on an untimed down at the end of regulation to tie the game, and another on the opening possession of overtime to lead Stanford to a 31-24 victory Saturday.

"The key word is resilience," Shaw said. "It's the mark of a

successful team, it's the mark of a successful person. How can you withstand the storms that life gives you? ... Our guys took it on the chin quite a bit, but we fought back and made some big plays."

McKee came back after leaving for a play on the final drive of regulation with injured ribs to tie it on a 2-yard pass to Elijah Higgins after a holding penalty by Oregon (4-1, 1-1 Pac-12) in the end zone extended the game one play.

McKee then gave the Cardinal (3-2, 2-1) the lead with a 14-yarder to John Humphreys in overtime. Stanford then forced Anthony Brown to throw an incomplete pass on fourth-and-8 to seal its fourth win against an Ducks team ranked in the top 10

since 2009 and set off a wild on-field celebration with the students and players.

"We were all on cloud nine. Just pure joy," linebacker Gabe Reid said. "There were a lot of ups and downs. We tried to say consistent with our energy and our passion. We like to think we deal with adversity well."

Oregon appeared poised for its first 5-0 start in eight years when it rallied from 10 points down at halftime to take a 24-17 lead early in the fourth quarter on Brown's second TD run of the game.

But then McKee delivered the big plays late and Stanford capitalized on three Ducks penalties on the game-tying 87-yard drive in the final 1:59 of regulation.

"We had some bright moments, but certainly not enough to overcome some of our own mistakes," coach Mario Cristobal said. "We didn't play with enough discipline today and we didn't coach with enough discipline today. It ends up costing us the game."

McKee left the game for one play on the drive after being hit in the ribs by Kayvon Thibodeaux on a play ruled targeting. Oregon was then called for another roughing the passer penalty and the holding penalty in the end zone on what appeared to be the final play.

The Cardinal got the untimed down and McKee delivered with the pass to Higgins. Shaw opted for the extra point and the game went to OT.

Red Sox move to the brink of playoffs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Christian Vázquez tripled home the tiebreaking run in the ninth inning and the Boston Red Sox moved to the brink of a postseason berth with a 5-3 win over the Washington Nationals on Saturday.

Boston is tied with the New York Yankees for the top AL wild card entering the final day of the regular season. The Red Sox were sending ace Chris Sale to the mound Sunday against the Nationals needing a victory to punch a playoff ticket. If they win, they'll host Tuesday's wild-card game regardless of New York's outcome because Boston won the season series 10-9.

"We know what that means if we win," Boston manager Alex Cora said.

Brandon Lowe hit three home runs and the Toronto Blue Jays rolled to a 12-2 blow-out that prevented the Yankees from clinching a playoff spot Saturday. Instead, they fell into a tie with Boston atop the AL wild-card standings.

If the Red Sox lose Sunday, they will still be assured entry into a tiebreaker game Monday. Boston is a game ahead of Toronto and Seattle.

"Total team effort," Cora said. "It wasn't easy. ... It hasn't been easy all season."

Tanner Houck pitched five perfect innings, striking out eight, but Washington

tied it at 1 in the eighth inning on Juan Soto's long, bases-loaded sacrifice fly to center off Austin Davis (1-2).

J.D. Martinez led off the ninth with a walk for Boston, and Vázquez drilled a ball to right off closer Tanner Rainey (1-3) that easily scored pinch-runner José Iglesias for a 2-1 lead with two outs. Travis Shaw singled to drive in Vázquez, then Kiké Hernández homered into the Red Sox bullpen against Mason Thompson to push the lead to 5-1.

The Nationals' Andrew Stevenson hit a two-run homer in the ninth before Hansel Robles finished the game for his 14th save.

Washington loaded the bases with one out in the eighth after center fielder Hunter Renfroe lost a fly ball in the twilight, leading to a double, and Adam Ottavino walked two. Soto hit a soaring ball to deep center to tie it, but Josh Bell followed with a soft lineout to end the threat.

Soto said he thought Davis was "lucky" the ball was an out instead of a grand slam. Soto also said Davis was "talking trash" during the at-bat.

Rafael Devers' 36th homer of the season put Boston in front 1-0 in the fourth. Devers struck out against Rainey with the bases loaded and two out in the eighth.

Houck zipped through the Nationals' lineup, needing just 53 pitches to strike out

eight among the 15 consecutive outs he recorded. Washington hit one ball out of the infield before Houck was lifted for pinch-hitter Christian Arroyo in the sixth.

Houck, a 25-year-old rookie, twice threw 90 pitches among his 13 starts this season. Both came in late August. He had not thrown more than 42 pitches in his last three appearances, all of which were in relief.

Before the game, Cora said there were no limitations on Houck, who pitched five innings three times earlier this season. He pitched into the sixth once, on Aug. 29.

With a chance to pitch his team into the postseason, New York starter Jordan Montgomery instead was rocked for a career-worst seven earned runs in 2⅓ innings. He gave up a pair of three-run homers to Lowe, who also went deep in the seventh against Michael King.

Even with the embarrassing defeat before a booing home crowd of 41,648, the streaky Yankees (91-70) can still punch their AL wild-card ticket Sunday with a victory over Tampa Bay in the scheduled regular-season finale.

Another loss, and it gets dicey.

"We've got to win. It's as simple as that," veteran outfielder Brett Gardner said. "Here we are going into Game 162 not knowing what the future is."

Astros clinch home-field edge against White Sox

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Yordan Alvarez and Kyle Tucker hit two of the Houston Astros' four homers in a 10-4 win over the Oakland Athletics to lock up home-field advantage in the AL Division Series.

With the win, the AL West champion Astros will host the first two games in their best-of-five match-up against the AL Central champion White Sox next week.

Houston owns the tiebreaker between the teams, winning five out of seven against Chicago this season.

Phil Maton (6-0) loaded the bases with two outs in the fifth but induced a groundout by Seth Brown to earn the win.

Paul Blackburn (1-4) was tagged for a season-high six

runs on seven hits in two innings.

Dodgers 8, Brewers 3: Julio Uriás (20-3) became Los Angeles' first 20-game winner since Clayton Kershaw in 2014, pitching one-run ball into the seventh inning in a home win that extended the NL West race to the final day of the regular season.

Blue Jays 10, Orioles 1: Vladimir Guerrero Jr. hit his 47th home run and Toronto pressed its AL wild-card chase to the final day of the regular season by thumping Baltimore.

Mariners 6, Angels 4: Mitch Haniger drove in five runs and his two-out, two-run single in the eighth inning gave host Seattle the lead as the Mariners took their playoff hopes to the final day of the regular season.

White Sox 5, Tigers 4: Lucas Giolito tuned up for the playoffs with a solid start, Yoán Moncada hit a go-ahead, two-run homer in the eighth inning and host Chicago beat Detroit for its sixth straight win.

Cubs 6, Cardinals 5: Ian Happ drove a two-out, two-run homer in the ninth inning to sour what could be Jon Lester's final career start, lifting Chicago to a win at St. Louis.

Braves 6, Mets 5: Joc Pederson hit a solo homer off Carlos Carrasco (1-5) in the third inning, William Contreras went deep with a two-run shot off Carrasco in the fourth and host Atlanta beat New York.

Rangers 7, Indians 2: Jordan Lyles closed his season by allowing only two hits in seven innings and rookie Jonah Heim

broke a fourth-inning tie with a three-run home run to help host Texas beat Cleveland.

Pirates 8, Reds 6: Bryan Reynolds had four hits, raising his batting average above .300, to help Pittsburgh rally from a five-run deficit and beat visiting Cincinnati.

Twins 4, Royals 0: Griffin Jax and a trio of relievers combined on a three-hitter and visiting Minnesota blanked Salvador Perez and Kansas City.

Marlins 3, Phillies 1: Jesús Luzardo struck out a career-high 11 and Jazz Chisholm Jr. hit a three-run homer to help host Miami beat Philadelphia.

Diamondbacks 11, Rockies 2: Pavin Smith reached base five times and host Arizona chased Antonio Senzatela (4-10) with a six-run first inning.