

Marines tie AAV sinking to pandemic burnout

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A new investigation into the drowning of eight Marines and a sailor last year says that senior commanders responsible for ensuring troops' safety failed to keep up with mounting demands from the pandemic, the prospect of war with Iran and the militarization of the southern border.

Released Wednesday, the report does not excuse those Marine Corps officials whose lack of oversight was faulted previously in the sinking of a 26-ton amphibious assault vehicle during training off the California coast.

The report, however, scrutinizes what a senior military leader determined were other contributing factors. Lt. Gen. Carl Mundy III said that it

"would be a mistake to discount or overlook" the demands on commanders, their staffs and rank-and-file troops ahead of the disaster on July 30, 2020.

"The claims on their time and attention surfaced in a number of interviews with several senior officers who described the conditions during this period as second only to their experience in combat," Mundy wrote.

Numerous Marine officers were removed from their jobs after the incident, including Maj. Gen. Robert Castellvi, who at the time was commanding general of 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, Calif. Marine Corps investigators previously found that the deaths were "preventable," with shoddy maintenance and inspections, complacency and inadequate

training all leading to the tragedy.

The results of this latest Marine Corps investigation were released along with the findings of a parallel Navy inquiry that uncovered communication problems between the services on the day of the disaster, in which the armored ship-to-shore transport craft took on water and sank off the coast of San Clemente Island while returning to the USS Somerset.

The Navy's investigator, Rear Adm. Christopher Sweeney, found that the Somerset's commanding officer at the time, Navy Capt. Dave Kurtz, "did not fully understand communication pathways" between the ship and Marine vehicles involved in the operation. But Navy officials said the Somerset

responded promptly when the situation's severity became clear, and that the communication problems did not cause the disaster.

Kurtz did not respond to a request for comment.

No Navy personnel were removed from their job as a result of the incident, but a senior commander, Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, said in a conference call with reporters that some have been subject to administrative action. He declined to disclose specifics.

"This tragedy should never have occurred," Kitchener said. "We will not let the lives be lost in vain. We have learned from this, and we will permanently improve the way we plan and execute amphibious operations."

Russia-NATO relations hit bottom after spy expulsions

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

NATO's relations with Moscow have reached a post-Cold War low as member countries confront a rise in "malign activity," the alliance's top official said Thursday.

Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg made the comments a day after NATO removed the accreditation of eight "undeclared Russian intelligence officers" on assignment at the organization's Brussels headquarters.

The size of the Russian mission to NATO was also cut in half, from 20 to 10.

Stoltenberg said the expulsions were based on intelligence and weren't linked to any single event.

"But we have seen over some time now, an increase in Russian malign activity," Stoltenberg said, adding that relations have sunken to their lowest point in decades "because of Russian behavior."

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent annexation of Crimea in 2014, talks between the alliance and Russia have been

limited, and the NATO-Russia Council, the main forum for dialogue, has been mostly inactive.

"NATO proposed to hold another meeting of the NATO-Russia Council over 18 months ago, and that proposal stands. The ball is in Russia's court," an alliance official told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Leonid Slutsky, the chairman of the foreign affairs committee in Russia's lower house of parliament, dismissed the accusations against the Russian diplomats as baseless and warned that NATO's move will further strain relations, the AP reported.

Countries in the alliance have frequently complained of aggressive Russian tactics. Russian fighter planes have buzzed allied warships numerous times in the past few years and flown dangerously close to U.S. aircraft in international airspace. NATO members have also accused Moscow of waging cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns targeting Western elections.

Stoltenberg's comments came after a meet-

ing with allied national security advisers, including American adviser Jake Sullivan.

Stoltenberg also met Wednesday with senior Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi in Zurich.

Dealing with a more assertive China has become a higher priority for NATO in recent years.

But as some allies take steps to play a larger role in the Pacific, tensions have emerged.

A new U.S. nuclear submarine deal with Australia, intended to bolster a key Western ally's sea power in the Pacific, recently led to the cancellation of a French diesel submarine contract.

The deal took France by surprise, resulting in the most significant diplomatic rift between Washington and Paris in decades.

Stoltenberg said Thursday that maintaining such relationships within NATO is critical.

"There is broad agreement that we should prevent bilateral disputes between allies [from causing] a rift within the alliance," he said.

Iranian boats reportedly intercepted US vessel

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's state TV reported Thursday that speedboats belonging to the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard intercepted a U.S. vessel in the Persian Gulf. A U.S. Navy spokesman said he was not aware of any such encounter at sea over the past days.

The region remains on edge over Iran's escalating nuclear program. Talks in Vienna to revive Tehran's now-tattered 2015 accord with world powers have stalled since June, with no date set for their resumption.

Thursday's Iranian report aired footage that the TV said was filmed from one of the Guard speedboats. It shows a vessel with the U.S. flag and several personnel on board as the speedboat appears to be chasing it.

A voice is heard in Farsi, saying: "Keep chasing them." The report did not say when the encounter took place.

Cmdr. Timothy Hawkins, a spokesman for the U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, said he wasn't aware of any sort of unsafe interaction with Iran in the last two days.

The report is the first such report in recent months.

In May, the Guard rejected the U.S. Navy's claim that fast-approaching Iranian speedboats in the Strait of Hormuz sparked a tense encounter a day after the United States said the Revolutionary Guard sent 13 armed speedboats too close to U.S. Navy vessels in the Strait.

The U.S. at the time said a Coast Guard cutter fired warning shots when two of the Iranian boats came dangerously close.

The 2015 nuclear deal saw Tehran drastically limit its en-

richment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. In 2018, then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord, raising tensions across the wider Middle East and sparking a series of attacks and incidents.

With the talks in Vienna now stalled, Iran has breached limits set by the accord and is enriching small amounts of uranium to its closest-ever levels to weapons-grade purity as its stockpile continues to grow.

Iran has said that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes.

Taiwanese official warns of China invasion preparation

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

China will likely have the means to invade Taiwan within four years, the island's defense minister told reporters this week after Beijing sent an unprecedented 149 warplanes into the island's airspace.

The incursions happened over a four-day period, between Oct. 1 and Monday, southwest of the island but within its air defense identification zone. An additional 57 Chinese aircraft entered the zone on Tuesday and Wednesday, according to the Taiwan Ministry of National Defense.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered his military to pump up pressure on the southwestern region of Taiwan, according to sources quoted by a Japanese news agency this week.

Taiwan Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng, speaking Wednesday in Taipei, said Beijing, which claims the democratic island as its own territory, hasn't invaded yet because the human and military costs would be too high.

"By 2025, China will bring the

cost and attrition to its lowest. It has the capacity now, but it will not start a war easily, having to take many other things into consideration," he said without elaborating.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen wrote a statement published Tuesday on the Foreign Affairs website saying the island does not seek military confrontation.

"It hopes for peaceful, stable, predictable, and mutually beneficial coexistence with its neighbors," she said. "But if its democracy and way of life are threatened, Taiwan will do whatever it takes to defend itself."

State Department spokesman Ned Price, in a statement Monday, emphasized the United States' commitment to helping Taiwan maintain "sufficient self-defense capability" and keeping peace in the region.

In August, the Biden administration approved a deal potentially worth \$750 million to sell Taiwan 40 new M109 self-propelled howitzers and nearly 1,700 kits to convert projectiles into more accurate GPS-guided munitions.

N. Korea says Border Patrol incident shows US hypocrisy

By DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — North Korea has ridiculed the United States' reputation as a "human rights exemplar" and referenced viral images of U.S. agents chasing Haitian migrants near the Mexican border late last month.

News reports from near the international bridge connecting Del Rio, Texas, and Acuna, Mexico, said Border Patrol agents on horseback appeared to be using lariats near the migrants. Thousands of Haitians crossed into Del Rio in September following the July assassination of President Jovenel Moise and an August earthquake that killed nearly 2,000 people, according to the United Nations.

Photographer Paul Ratje, who took a now-viral image of a Border Patrol agent on horseback chasing migrants holding bags of food, told PolitiFact he saw the agent swing his horse reins in the air while in pursuit. The photographer said he did not witness whippings, but the agent's actions

"looked pretty threatening."

"The behavior of the border patrols who insulted the immigrants, whirling their whips, is not a problem confined to individuals, but an inevitable consequence brought by the corrupt American society," North Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement Tuesday.

The statement also referenced videos of agents verbally disparaging the migrants that it characterized as "an undisguised reflection of racial discrimination."

"This reveals the absurdity of 'human rights' and 'democracy' claimed by the U.S.; and this systematic racial discrimination is rooted too deep in the U.S. to be properly addressed," it said.

North Korea's state-run media frequently reference U.S. news reports to criticize American society and leaders.

The North is described as "one of the most repressive countries in the world" by the Human Rights Watch, as evidenced by its forced labor prison camps, torture and regulation of free speech.

Gamer hijacks Navy destroyer Facebook page

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The USS Kidd's official Facebook page has been hijacked by someone who spent more than six hours livestreaming a 1990s-era video game called *Age of Empires*.

The first gameplay video of the popular real-time strategy franchise appeared on the destroyer's page Sunday morning with this taunting caption: "Hahahahaha."

Five more videos, each of which are more than an hour long, popped up over the next several hours with the captions "play game," "hi everyone," "hi guys," "ffffffffffff" and "POSC."

The page's description was also altered to read "Gaming Video Creator" and "Level Up." The videos were still up as of Thursday afternoon in Everett, Wash., where the Kidd is homeported.

News of the incident was first reported by the military news website Task & Purpose on Wednesday.

"The official Facebook page for USS Kidd was hacked," Navy spokeswoman Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman told the site. "We are currently working with Facebook technical support to resolve the issue."

A spokesperson for the Kidd did not immediately respond to emails from Stars and Stripes for more information Wednesday.

The six videos had garnered more than 19,000 views and about 80 comments as of Wednesday night. One person wrote, "Just in time for Cyber Awareness month."

Petty officer becomes 14th sailor to die of coronavirus

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Friends and family mourned the death of a 51-year-old Navy petty officer from coronavirus complications this week, as the service continues to work toward vaccinating nearly all sailors by late November.

Petty Officer 1st Class Cory Weber died Sunday at Sunrise Hospital in Las Vegas, the Navy said.

An aviation electrician's mate assigned to Naval Aviation Warfighting Development Center in Fallon, Nev., he'd been hospitalized since Sept. 20, the service said in a statement Wednesday.

Weber tested positive for COVID-19 on Sept. 17, the Navy said. His death a little over two weeks later shocked fellow service members, who turned to social media to share their grief.

"Not the news I was expecting to get this morning," Christopher Barnes wrote Sunday on Facebook. "Saw him just before I left Fallon, fist bumped on the way out the door. Talked to him a few days before he got sedated and he was in good spirits."

Weber was assigned to a small command that serves as the center of excellence for naval aviation training and tactics development, which includes the famed Top Gun school. It's made up of about 260 officers and enlisted personnel, as well as some 50 contractors, its website states.

Several friends shared recollections of Weber in comments on a Facebook post

containing over a dozen photos of him. Some didn't know he was sick. Others thought he'd already recovered.

"I messaged him just to ask if he was good cause I hadn't heard anything, and got nothing. Guess I still didn't think this," wrote Chandra Jean Barnes. "I'm still waiting for a response, like it didn't happen."

The deaths of more than 60 service members have been attributed to complications of COVID-19. Weber is the 14th such Navy fatality, but the service did not say whether he was among the 90% of its active-duty force that had been fully vaccinated.

With 94% of its military personnel having received at least one vaccine dose, the Navy is leading the Defense Department in inoculations for the virus, followed by the Air Force at nearly 89% and the Marines at about 82%, according to a Stars and Stripes analysis of Pentagon data as of Sept. 30.

Unless exempted, active-duty sailors and Marines have until Nov. 28 to be fully vaccinated, and reserve members have until just after Christmas. Deadlines for the Air Force are Nov. 2 and Dec. 2, respectively, for members on active duty and in the Guard and reserves.

The Army is trailing the other services, with 67% of soldiers at least partially vaccinated, the analysis showed. But its Dec. 15 deadline for active-duty members to receive both doses is the latest of the branches. Army reservists and Guard members have until June 30 to get both doses.

Investigators board ship anchored near oil pipeline

Associated Press

HUNTINGTON BEACH, Calif. — U.S. Coast Guard investigators have boarded a massive cargo ship as they probe what caused the rupture of an offshore oil pipeline that sent crude washing up on Southern California beaches.

The Associated Press reported Wednesday that the Rotterdam Express appeared to make a series of unusual movements while anchored in the closest spot to where the break in the pipeline happened, according to data collected by a marine navigation service. The Coast Guard is investigating whether a ship anchor might have snagged and bent the pipeline owned by Amplify

Energy, a Houston-based company that operates three offshore oil platforms south of Los Angeles.

AP reviewed more than two weeks of data from MarineTraffic, a navigation service that tracks radio signals from transponders that broadcast the locations of ships and large boats every few minutes.

MarineTraffic spokesman Fotini Tseroni said in an email early Thursday that the questionable movements indicated for the Rotterdam Express on its website may have resulted from errors involving the ship's GPS system, rather than showing the ship's actual position. The company said it was removing the jumps in position to show

that the ship stayed within its anchorage.

The Rotterdam Express, a German-flagged ship nearly 1,000 feet long, was assigned to anchorage SF-3, the closest to where the pipeline ruptured off Huntington Beach. Hapag-Lloyd, the shipping company that operates the Rotterdam Express, confirmed Thursday that investigators boarded the ship Wednesday while it was docked at the Port of Oakland. The company has said it played no role in the oil spill.

"We are fully cooperating with the authorities at this moment," said Nils Haupt, a spokesman at Hapag-Lloyd's headquarters in Hamburg, Germany.

Roads, homes flood as front swamps Ala.

Associated Press

PELHAM, Ala. — Terrified drivers climbed out of swamped cars and muddy floodwater flowed through neighborhoods after a stalled weather front drenched Alabama for hours, leaving entire communities under water Thursday and killing at least four people, with still more drenching storms to come.

Dozens of people had to be rescued Wednesday night in central Alabama, where the National Weather Service said as much as 13 inches of rain fell, and a south Alabama town temporarily lost its main grocery store when a creek came through the doors of the Piggly Wiggly. Near the coast, heavy rains caused sewage to bubble out of underground pipes.

Metro Birmingham remained under a flash flood watch, and meteorologists predicted another wet day for most of Alabama and parts of Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. As much as 5 more inches of rain was possible through Thursday evening, the weather service said.

A 4-year-old girl and an 18-year-old woman died in separate incidents when floods carried away vehicles in northeast Alabama, said Marshall County Coroner Cody Nugent. Searchers found the bodies of a boyfriend and girlfriend, both 23, inside a car that was swept away by a fast-moving stream in the Birmingham suburb of Hoover, said Shelby County Coroner Lina Evans.

“Normally it’s just a trickle. It was rag-

ing,” she said. She identified the victims as Latin Marie Hill and Myles Jared Butler, both of Hoover.

The rain caused havoc in places across north Alabama, submerging cars in metro Birmingham and parts of the Tennessee Valley. Rescue crews helped motorists escape as low visibility and standing water made travel life-threatening in some areas.

Some of the worst flooding happened in Pelham, outside Birmingham, where 82 people were rescued from homes and more than 15 were pulled from vehicles after up to 13 inches of rain sent creeks and streams overflowing their banks, the Pelham Fire Department said early Thursday. More than 100 rescuers were involved in the effort, as were 16 boats, the statement said.

Congress works on short-term fix to debt limit rift

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican and Democratic leaders edged back from a perilous standoff over lifting the nation’s borrowing cap, with Democratic senators signaling they were receptive to an offer from Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell that would allow an emergency extension into December.

McConnell made the offer late Wednesday shortly before Republicans were prepared to block legislation to suspend the debt limit until December and as President Joe Biden and business leaders ramped up their concerns that an unprecedented federal default would disrupt government payments to millions of people and throw the nation into recession.

The emerging agreement sets the stage for

a sequel of sorts in December, when Congress will again face pressing deadlines to fund the government and raise the debt limit before heading home for the holidays.

A procedural vote — on the longer extension the Republicans were going to block — was abruptly delayed late Wednesday and the Senate recessed so lawmakers could confer. Democrats emerged from their meeting more optimistic that a crisis would be averted.

“Basically, I’m glad that Mitch McConnell finally saw the light,” said Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. The Republicans “have finally done the right thing and at least we now have another couple months in order to get a permanent solution.”

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., added that, assuming final details in the emergency legislation are in order, “for the next three months, we’ll continue to make it clear that we are ready to continue to vote to pay our bills and Republicans aren’t.”

Unsurprisingly, McConnell portrayed it very differently.

“This will moot Democrats’ excuses about the time crunch they created and give the unified Democratic government more than enough time to pass standalone debt limit legislation through reconciliation,” he said.

Congress has just days to act before the Oct. 18 deadline when the Treasury Department has warned it would quickly run short of funds to handle the nation’s debt load.

Federal judge orders Texas to halt its abortion law

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — A federal judge ordered Texas to suspend the most restrictive abortion law in the U.S., calling it an “offensive deprivation” of a constitutional right by banning most abortions in the nation’s second-most populous state since September.

The order Wednesday by U.S. District Judge Robert Pitman is the first legal blow to the Texas law known as Senate Bill 8, which until now had withstood a wave of early challenges. In the weeks since the restrictions took effect, Texas abortion providers say the impact has been “exactly what we feared.”

In a 113-page opinion, Pitman took Texas to task over the law, saying Republican lawmakers had “contrived an unprecedented and transparent statutory scheme” by leaving enforcement solely in the hands of private citizens, who are entitled to collect \$10,000 in damages if they bring successful lawsuits against abortion providers who violate the restrictions.

The law, signed by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in May, prohibits abortions once cardiac activity is detected, which is usually around six weeks, before some women even know they are pregnant.

“From the moment S.B. 8 went into effect,

women have been unlawfully prevented from exercising control over their lives in ways that are protected by the Constitution,” wrote Pitman, who was appointed to the bench by former President Barack Obama.

“That other courts may find a way to avoid this conclusion is theirs to decide; this Court will not sanction one more day of this offensive deprivation of such an important right.”

But even with the law on hold, abortion services in Texas may not instantly resume because doctors still fear that they could be sued without a more permanent legal decision.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

2 fined over causing Coast Guard search

RI PROVIDENCE—Two Rhode Island men authorities say touched off a needless and expensive ocean search-and-rescue effort when they fired maritime distress flares to celebrate a friend's wedding have agreed to pay \$5,000 each to settle the case, federal prosecutors said Tuesday.

The Coast Guard and the town of New Shoreham spent more than \$100,000 combined responding to the flares off Block Island on June 6, 2020, when there was no one in distress, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office in Providence.

Perry Phillips, 31, and Benjamin Foster, 33, "knowingly and willfully communicated a false distress message to the Coast Guard," according to the civil complaint.

The men borrowed a flare gun and flares, set out on the water in a small skiff, and fired three flares when they thought they could be seen by people at their friend's wedding reception, prosecutors said.

People who saw the flares reported them to the New Shoreham harbor master, who in turn alerted the Coast Guard.

Post office renamed for 2 slain employees

TN MEMPHIS — A small-town Tennessee post office where two mail workers were fatally shot during a robbery 11 years ago has been renamed in the women's honor.

The post office in the rural

West Tennessee town of Henning was renamed Tuesday for U.S. Postal Service employees Paula Robinson and Judy Spray, Rep. David Kustoff said in a news release.

Chastain Montgomery Sr. and his 18-year-old son robbed the post office and shot the women before fleeing on Oct. 18, 2010. Chastain Montgomery Jr. was killed in a shootout with police four months later. The elder Montgomery pleaded guilty to the killings and was sentenced to life in federal prison in 2014.

Kustoff led a bill in Congress to rename the post office the "Paula Croom Robinson and Judy Spray Memorial Post Office Building."

Ruling: Victim must talk if prosecutor asks

AZ PHOENIX — An appellate court decision says Arizona's constitutional protections for crime victims don't prevent prosecutors from conducting pretrial interviews of victims who object.

The Court of Appeals' ruling Tuesday said the Constitution's Victim's Bill of Rights allows victims to refuse pretrial interviews with defendants or defense lawyers, but the court said that right of refusal does not extend to interviews or depositions with the prosecution.

The court issued its ruling in a Yavapai County case involving a woman who is awaiting trial on a charge of luring a minor for sexual exploitation after allegedly sending a "suggestive photo" to a boy who was 14 years old at the time. The boy initially told prosecutors that he and the woman exchanged sexually ex-

plicit texts and photos, but he later declined to meet with prosecutors to prepare for his trial testimony.

Deceased incumbent gets votes, but loses

AL MOBILE — Voters elected a living challenger over a deceased incumbent, who still managed to garner a sizable chunk of the vote, in a runoff Tuesday for the Mobile City Council.

News outlets report that William Carroll defeated Mobile City Council member Levon Manzie. Manzie died last month after an extended illness, but his name was still on the ballot in mostly Black District 2, which Carroll once represented.

Carroll won with 1,464 votes, or 57% of the vote, according to FOX10. Manzie, even though he is deceased, received 1,100 votes, or 43% of the vote.

WKRQ-TV reported there were still posters and banners throughout the district asking voters to support Manzie. Carroll and supporters claim an out-of-town political action committee controlled by white Republicans was still pushing Manzie as a candidate. Both Manzie and Carroll are Black.

Tropical larvae found in fruit from Costa Rica

MS GULFPORT — The U.S. government ordered the destruction of a \$15,000 shipment of pineapples from Costa Rica after agriculture inspectors in Mississippi found butterfly larvae that they said could be harmful.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said in a news release Monday that inspectors

from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service found the Saunders 1850 larvae Sept. 2 at the Port of Gulfport. It was the first time the larvae, which is considered a pest, had been found in the United States.

Museum presents Green Book exhibit

LA BATON ROUGE — The Louisiana State Museum is presenting programs every Thursday this month to go with an exhibit about "The Negro Motorist Green Book" — the guidebook that sparked the Oscar-winning movie "Green Book."

The exhibit ends Nov. 14 at the Capitol Park Museum, the only Louisiana site to show the exhibition by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, officials said in a news release.

BBQ stuffed egg rolls on state fair menu

NC RALEIGH — After missing last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the N.C. State Fair returns in 2021 with its annual list of diet-busting, heart-challenging concoctions, including a turkey leg stuffed with shrimp Alfredo and barbecue stuffed egg rolls.

There are more than 20 new foods on the menu for this year's fair, which starts on Oct. 14, The News & Observer of Raleigh reported. The list also includes cornbread and chili funnel cakes, deep-fried cookie dough covered in powdered sugar and chocolate sauce, and a dish of barbecue and grits.

— From wire reports

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Taylor hits walk-off HR for Dodgers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — One big swing by Chris Taylor sent the Los Angeles Dodgers soaring and the St. Louis Cardinals crashing.

Taylor hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the ninth inning to give the Dodgers a 3-1 victory Wednesday night in a scintillating NL wild-card game.

Justin Turner homered early and the 106-win Dodgers advanced to a best-of-five Division Series against the NL West champion Giants, who won 107 games to barely hold off rival Los Angeles for the division title. Game 1 is Friday night in San Francisco.

“That’s gonna be fun. Yeah, two of the best regular-season records of all-time. We’ve been battling all year, so I expect a hard-fought series,” Taylor said.

The Dodgers celebrated on

the field before heading into their clubhouse to continue the party. Champagne and beer were poured over the heads of shirtless, goggle-wearing players, thrilled to have stayed alive for a shot at their Bay Area adversary.

“One of the great rivalries in sports,” Los Angeles manager Dave Roberts said. “It’s happening.”

The sellout crowd of 53,193 at Dodger Stadium hung on every pitch as the tension of a tie game built from the fourth inning on. Fans waved blue towels, futilely urging on the few balls launched into the outfield only to see them caught in a winner-take-all matchup between two of the National League’s most storied and successful franchises.

The crowd was on its feet in the ninth, anxiously waiting to see if the defending World Se-

ries champions could pull out a must-have win. Cody Bellinger got the Dodgers started when he drew a two-out walk from T.J. McFarland. Alex Reyes entered to face Taylor, and Bellinger stole second.

“That’s huge, knowing I don’t have to do too much,” said Taylor, batting in the No. 9 slot after entering to play left field as part of a double switch in the seventh. “It kind of settled me down a little bit.”

Taylor then sent a 2-1 breaking ball into the left-field pavilion, triggering an explosion of cheers and ending an October struggle that lasted 4 hours, 15 minutes.

The versatile veteran struggled in September because of a recurring neck injury, and he came off the bench in the Dodgers’ most important game of the season so far.

“Honestly, I was just trying to

hit a single,” Taylor said after launching the fourth game-ending homer in Dodgers postseason history. “He gave me a good slider to hit and I was able to get it up in the air.”

Taylor also made a nifty defensive play in the eighth, robbing Edmundo Sosa of a hit for the second out.

Tommy Edman dropped a one-out single into right off closer Kenley Jansen in the top of the ninth and stole second. Paul Goldschmidt took a called third strike and Tyler O’Neill went down swinging to end the threat. Edman went 3-for-5 with a run scored.

The Dodgers’ bullpen stymied the St. Louis hitters, allowing just a pair of singles after the fifth inning.

“The whole bullpen stepped up. We’ve been doing it the whole year,” Jansen said. “Off we go up north now.”

Padres’ third-place finish in NL West gets Tingler fired

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The San Diego Padres still believe they have a World Series-caliber team despite a brutal late-season collapse that left them with yet another losing record.

If the Padres do make it to the Fall Classic in the near future, it won’t be Jayce Tingler who leads them there as manager.

San Diego fired Tingler on Wednesday, three days after it finished 79-83 and in third place in the NL West, 28 games behind San Francisco.

General manager A.J. Preller said Tingler — who just a season ago was second in voting for NL Manager of the Year — would be given the opportunity to remain in the organization.

Tingler’s fate was sealed during a shocking freefall that saw the Padres go from a one-game lead for the NL’s second wild-card spot on Sept. 9 to being

eliminated from playoff contention with seven games left. The team clinched its 10th losing record in 11 seasons.

Tingler was 116-106 overall in two seasons.

Preller said San Diego has embraced the high expectations fostered by its playoff run during the pandemic-shortened 2020 season, led by superstars Fernando Tatis Jr. and Manny Machado and with Tingler as their rookie manager.

“Ultimately, I felt like this was a change we needed to make in order to get us on that big stage,” Preller said after firing Tingler, his friend from their days together with the Texas Rangers organization. “We feel like we have a talented roster and we have a team that should play into October. The decision today reflects that.”

In a statement, Tingler said: “While I’m profoundly disap-

pointed that our season ended far too soon, I know this team has a very bright future ahead.”

Like Preller, owner Peter Seidler said this season “ultimately is viewed as an aberration because we’re a World Series-caliber, competitive team going forward for the next several years. That’s certainly the standard we hold ourselves to,” Seidler said.

Tingler guided the Padres to a 37-23 record in 2020 and their first playoff appearance in 13 years. They beat the St. Louis Cardinals in a wild-card series before being swept in the division series by the eventual World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers.

With a payroll of \$175 million, San Diego entered this season with World Series aspirations and played with swagger until a number of problems surfaced during the second half, on the field and in the clubhouse.

Although Tatis remains one of the frontrunners for NL MVP, he was bothered by a recurring left shoulder injury and was even moved to the outfield for a time in an attempt to lessen his exposure to injury.

There were reports that some players were unhappy that the Padres tried to trade first baseman Eric Hosmer at the deadline. Later, reports surfaced that some players had gone to Preller to voice their displeasure with the job Tingler was doing.

In a stunning dugout dustup on Sept. 18, Machado cursed and yelled at Tatis and had to be separated by teammates and a coach. The spat came after Tatis struck out looking and then argued the call by umpire Phil Cuzzi. Tingler had been ejected when he came out to argue on Tatis’ behalf and wasn’t in the dugout when the superstars clashed.

Robinson's the engine for Texas' offense

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Bijan Robinson spent far too much of last season watching others play football. No more.

The Texas Longhorns running back is getting the ball a lot in 2021, early in games and late. That's just what new coach Steve Sarkisian promised when the season began.

Robinson has been one of college football's standout players over the first half of the season, delivering on the expectations that came with being the top-rated running back in the country coming out of high school in 2019.

With 819 total yards and nine touchdowns, he's driving the Texas offense as the No. 21 Longhorns (4-1, 2-0 Big 12) head into Saturday's showdown in Dallas with No. 6 Oklahoma (5-0, 2-0).

Robinson ran for a career-high 216 yards and two touchdowns on 35 carries in the Longhorns' 32-27 win last week at TCU. His fourth quarter against the Horned Frogs: 12

carries, 93 yards, seven first downs. The last two first downs on the final drive killed a TCU rally and ran out the clock.

Texas quarterback Casey Thompson called it a display of "big-boy football." It certainly was a hammer blow.

"It's fun to break a defense's will," Robinson said.

Robinson runs with a style as hard to define as it is to defend. Quick feet in tight spaces allow him to make cuts the instant his eyes find the smallest of gaps. At 6-feet, 215 pounds, he is compact and powerful enough to lower his shoulder into defenders and push for extra yards.

And once he hits the second level of a defense, he sheds tacklers with a strong stiff arm and spin moves.

"It's just an instinct. You want to set them, get them off their feet and hesitating a little bit. Then you do it. They have no answer for it," Robinson said. "When I'm just running the ball and I see a look in their eyes with a little uncertainty ...

I just read their eyes and just deliver it."

Fans waited far too long to see all of this on display. Former coach Tom Herman recruited Robinson but kept him mostly on the sideline last season while the Longhorns' offense mostly centered around quarterback Sam Ehlinger.

Robinson carried the ball 10 or more times in just four games last season but finished on a tear. In the final two games against Kansas State and Colorado, Robinson romped for 335 yards with an incredible 18.7 yards per carry average.

Herman was fired shortly after the season. Sarkisian immediately tapped into the talent at hand, comparing Robinson to former Southern California standout Reggie Bush.

Sarkisian also told Robinson to prepare his body in the off-season to be ready for the physical punishment of playing more.

"We challenged him early on

to physically and mentally prepare himself for those kind of games," like TCU, Sarkisian said.

Robinson's numbers would be bigger if he'd played more in romps over Rice and Texas Tech. And he's too nice to criticize his light workload under Herman last season.

"At that time, it was still a slow process for me. They just wanted to take caution with how they used me," Robinson said.

But those who saw how the season ended had a sense of what could be coming in 2021. Robinson was named a preseason All-American despite his previously limited college résumé.

The only dent so far this season was a 69-yard performance in a 40-21 loss at Arkansas, the only time Robinson has been held under 100 yards this season. The Longhorns' offensive line was pushed around so much that night that Robinson was constantly on the run in his own backfield.

Pac-12's College Football Playoff chances not quite dead

Associated Press

The knee-jerk reaction to Oregon's loss to Stanford was that the Pac-12's College Football Playoff hopes are gone.

Not quite.

The conference still has a shot to get a team into the playoff for the first time since 2017, but the road definitely got a lot tougher with Stanford's 31-24 overtime win over the Ducks on Saturday.

"Our team has to make sure that times like this, when the noise surrounds your program, you got to make sure that you stick together and have each other's back," Oregon coach Mario Cristobal said. "And go attack the processes that are going to put you back on track to be 1-0, to continue playing in a conference that has a lot of good

football teams, a lot of good football players."

The Pac-12 has been mostly an afterthought for the playoff in recent years due to perception, lack of performance on the field and its teams knocking each other off.

The conference hasn't had a team reach the playoff since Washington in 2017 and hasn't won a playoff game since the Ducks reached the title game in 2014. The Pac-12's last national championship in football was by Southern California in 2004, a title that was later vacated by the BCS due to NCAA sanctions.

The conference has lacked consistently dominant teams like in the SEC, Big 12 and, until this season, Clemson in the ACC.

Oregon has won the past two Pac-12 championships, but missed out on a chance at the playoff in 2019 thanks in part to a late-season loss to Arizona State. The Ducks finished 4-3 during the pandemic-ravaged 2020 season, so were never in consideration.

Oregon started the season as the Pac-12's best bet to end the four-year CFP drought, opening at No. 11 in the preseason AP Top 25. The Ducks picked up a massive résumé-building win by beating No. 3 Ohio State in Week 2 and worked their way up the poll to No. 3.

Then came the Stanford stumble, dropping Oregon to No. 8 in this week's poll.

The good news is the loss came early in the season.

If the Ducks (4-1, 1-1 Pac-12)

can run the table the rest of the way and inch up the CFP rankings — the first one is Nov. 2 — an early season road loss to a conference opponent isn't going to look as bad as one late in the season. That early win at Ohio State also could be enough to erase the negativity of the Stanford loss if the Ducks can win out.

And one loss doesn't automatically count a team out. In the seven years of the playoff, just 11 of the 28 qualifying teams have been undefeated.

UCLA appeared to be the Pac-12's only other hope of reaching the playoff, but lost to Arizona State last week to drop to 3-2.

And don't count out the 22nd-ranked Sun Devils (4-1, 2-0).

NWSL players pause, recognize whistleblowers

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Players stopped on the field in the sixth minute of Wednesday night's National Women's Soccer League games and linked arms in a circle to demonstrate solidarity with two former players who came forward with allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct against a prominent coach.

"Tonight, we reclaim our place on the field, because we will not let our joy be taken from us," the NWSL Players' Association said in a statement released Wednesday night. "But this is not business as usual."

The league returned to the field Wednesday night after calling off last weekend's games while it came to terms with the allegations leveled last week against former North Carolina Courage coach Paul Riley, who was subsequently fired.

Earlier Wednesday, the owner of the Courage apologized for the franchise's "failure" to create an environment where players felt safe in coming forward.

Courage owner Steve Malik's statement in an open letter was the team's first public comment beyond the announcement of Riley's dismissal last Thursday. The allegations rocked the league and led to the resignation of National Women's Soccer League

Commissioner Lisa Baird.

Malik said in his letter that the Courage "conducted due diligence" in retaining Riley and the coaching staff after Malik bought the team in 2017.

"We were made aware of an investigation into Mr. Riley's behavior in 2015 and were subsequently assured that he was in good standing," Malik wrote. "During his employment with the Courage, we had no knowledge of allegations of sexual harassment or coercion. When we learned of the horrific allegations in last week's reporting, we took those seriously and immediately terminated Mr. Riley."

Two former NWSL players, Sinead Farrelly and Mana Shim, came forward with the allegations of abuse, including sexual coercion, dating back more than a decade. The allegations were detailed last week in a story by The Athletic.

Riley has denied any inappropriate behavior. He coached the NWSL's Portland Thorns in 2014 and 2015, when he was dismissed by the team, which had investigated him and shared its findings with the league. Riley then became coach of the Western New York Flash for a season before the team was sold and moved to North Carolina in 2017.

At the Courage match at home against Racing Louisville on Wednesday night, 12-year-old fan Julia Carolan said she wanted to convey "very supportive energy" for the Courage.

She and her mother are season ticket holders. They carried various signs, including one that read "No More Silence" as they prepared for the first game back since the stunning news.

"I think it's important we speak out and support," Carolan said. "We were very ready to see our players back and support them."

Gotham FC's game against the Spirit was played in Philadelphia in honor of veteran forward Carli Lloyd, who is retiring at the end of the season. Lloyd grew up across the Delaware River in Delran, N.J. The celebration was understandably muted.

"I hope and wish that this is a huge reset for this league, and to just start doing things right from the top down. I think that's the most important thing. We as players deserve the best," Lloyd said. "I'm going to be leaving this sport and all of these women deserve to have the best, to be playing on the best playing surfaces, to have the best coaches, to have the best owners. I am hopeful that that can happen."

Nagy makes Fields No. 1 Bears quarterback

Associated Press

LAKE FOREST, Ill. — Chicago Bears coach Matt Nagy had a plan to develop Justin Fields and resisted making the rookie his team's starting quarterback from the start of offseason practices.

Nagy has changed his mind and on Wednesday made Fields the team's starting quarterback going forward.

"I told you the last couple of weeks we've had some good conversations internally," Nagy said. "It's helped us in the last couple weeks."

"Continuing that process this week it's led to making the decision to move with Justin as the starter."

On Monday, Nagy had said Fields was still the backup and playing only because of Andy Dalton's knee injury. But on Tuesday he told both quarter-

backs of the change and announced it Wednesday. Dalton will return to practice this week after suffering a bone bruise to his left knee and will be the backup.

"I would say I was a little bit surprised, but I mean, not really crazy surprised, but definitely a little bit of surprise," Fields said. "I feel like he was pretty straightforward with me and Andy."

"And I think my teammates believe in me, so just grateful for the opportunity and just trying to get ready to work."

Fields experienced a dreadful start, going 6-for-20 for 68 yards and taking nine sacks in Week 3 against Cleveland. In his first home start on Sunday, he completed 11 of 17 passes for 209 yards, including a 64-yarder to Darnell Mooney.

"We've been patient with this, we've grown with him, we're

proud of Justin," Nagy said. "He's been a great teammate from the very beginning."

The Bears signed the veteran Dalton in free agency and traded up to No. 11 from No. 20 in the first round of the draft to pick Fields, and Nagy had said all along the job was Dalton's until coaches felt Fields was ready.

Then came the knee injury to Dalton in the first half against Cincinnati in Week 2.

"The plan and the process that we had going into this was important to understand, and then when Andy unfortunately got hurt with his knee, that sped the process up," Nagy said.

Dalton also had said he was promised the starting job this year, although nothing was ever said about how long he would keep that job.

Nagy cited the way Fields

bounced back with a strong effort against Detroit last Sunday as key to the decision after he had a poor game against Cleveland.

"There's a lot of guys that might not have come back from that," Nagy said. "That was tough, but that just shows who he is."

"All of us, just knowing and seeing what he's about, and then that trust. You know, Justin has earned that trust with us. Now, that's kind of why we went that way."

Telling Dalton had to be a difficult discussion for Nagy, considering the veteran had been promised the starting job and only made two starts.

"It's not easy," Nagy said. "And so there's that part of this and I just appreciate the way that he's handled everything, and so he's as special as they get, and I've been around a lot of special guys."