

US ready to empty Red Hill fuel tanks

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Defense Department will begin emptying millions of gallons of fuel from the defunct Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Honolulu next week after state officials on Tuesday signed off on defueling plans.

The job will take about three months, according to Joint Task Force-Red Hill, the entity overseeing the operation.

The Hawaii Department of Health gave the task force conditional approval to begin emptying 104 million gallons of fuel on Monday.

“Today’s conditional approval marks an important milestone in the process that will ultimately result in permanent closure of the Red Hill Facility and remediation of our aquifer,” Kathleen Ho, deputy director of environmental health for the Department of Health, said in a news release Tuesday.

The approval is conditional on the task force’s adherence to requirements placed on the operation by the Department of Health, which will have staff on-site to oversee defueling, the

news release said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gave the plans the green light last week.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in March 2022 ordered the World War II-era underground storage facility permanently closed after jet fuel leaked from its tanks and contaminated nearby well water in late 2021.

That contaminated well was part of the Navy’s distribution system that supplied tap water to about 93,000 people living in military communities on and near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. Thousands of residents were forced to relocate to area hotels for several months.

The tanks sit about 100 feet above an aquifer that supplies much of Honolulu’s tap water.

The start of defueling Monday comes after more than a year of planning, repairing and training by the Red Hill task force.

Nearly 300 repairs and enhancements were required to the vast underground piping system to safely defuel, the Health Department said in the news release.

“After months of methodical planning, preparing and re-

hearsing, we are ready to begin defueling Red Hill and setting the conditions for its closure,” Vice Adm. John Wade, the task force commander, said in a news release Monday.

“We have taken significant precautions to mitigate risk for safe operations, ensure preparedness to respond to contingencies and protect the aquifer, environment and human health as we defuel the facility,” he said.

Fuel will drain via gravity through roughly 3 miles of pipes that end at a fueling pier on the joint base.

The fuel will be loaded onto tanker ships and relocated to San Diego, Subic Bay in the Philippines, the Port of Singapore and a pair of fuel depots in Hawaii, the task force said in a statement Tuesday in response to a query by Stars and Stripes.

“We expect the removal to take 9 movements,” the task force said.

Filling a tanker takes about 52 hours, the task force said in a fact sheet on the defueling process.

The first transport ship, the merchant tanker *Empire State*, is slated to arrive at Pearl Harbor early Wednesday morning,

the task force said in an advisory on Monday.

The first phase of defueling will require two of the facility’s three main pipelines, bringing the fuel level in the tanks to about 10 feet.

That remaining fuel will be drained using a connection newly built for the defueling process, the Health Department said in its letter of conditional approval.

Among the required upgrades to the facility were improvements to fire-suppression equipment and beefed-up spill mitigation measures, such as the sealing of drains and construction of diversion berms.

The Navy has set up temporary air monitoring stations on Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and at adjacent military housing communities with an eye toward the defueling process, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported Monday.

The monitoring is “part of a greater spill response strategy to identify, quantify and assess potential threats to public safety, should there be a spill during the defueling of Red Hill,” a Navy spokesperson told the newspaper.

US mulls deploying 2nd carrier to Eastern Mediterranean

By **MATTHEW ADAMS**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower could soon be deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean, a defense official said Tuesday, a move that would position a second U.S. aircraft carrier in the region as fighting rages between Israeli forces and Hamas militants.

The Eisenhower, along with other ships and aircraft that make up its strike group, is scheduled to depart Norfolk, Va., this week. The aircraft carrier has long been scheduled to deploy and operate near Europe, Air Force

Lt. Col. Bryon McGarry, a Defense Department spokesman, said in a statement.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Sunday ordered the USS Gerald R. Ford carrier strike group to the region as part of the U.S. response to the Hamas attack on Israel.

The Ford arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean on Tuesday, U.S. Central Command said in a statement. The Ford strike group includes eight squadrons of attack and support aircraft, the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser USS Normandy and four Arleigh-Burke-class guided missile destroyers.

“The arrival of these highly capable forces

to the region is a strong signal of deterrence should any actor hostile to Israel consider trying to take advantage of this situation,” said Army Gen. Michael “Erik” Kurilla, commander of CENTCOM, which oversees operations in the Middle East.

A senior defense official, who spoke with reporters Monday on the condition of anonymity, said the Ford has the potential for long-range strike capabilities, but moving ships into the region was to deter groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and other Iranian-backed groups from escalating the conflict with Israel.

Missing Americans in Israel remembered

The Washington Post

When Hayim Katsman received his doctorate from the University of Washington in 2021, friends encouraged him to stay in the United States. He could build a good life there, they said, maybe even in Seattle, a city where his family had long roots.

Katsman, 32, was adamant. He wanted to return to Israel and the small commune where he had lived for years. He was committed to forging a more peaceful future for the residents of Israel and the Palestinians. His dissertation was dedicated to “all life forms that exist between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.”

On Saturday, Katsman was one of at least 14 Americans killed in a wave of unprecedented attacks by Hamas militants that plunged Israel into war. He died at the commune, or kibbutz, that he loved, located at the edge of Israel near where the Gaza Strip borders Egypt.

The number of Americans killed could rise along with the overall death toll in Israel, a testament to the close ties and history of immigration that link the two countries. More than 1,000 people have been killed in

Israel and at least 830 in Gaza by retaliatory strikes.

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden confirmed that Americans were also among the hostages taken by Hamas, but he did not specify how many.

“As president, I have no higher priority than the safety of Americans being held hostage around the world,” Biden said. “Like every nation in the world, Israel has the right to respond and indeed has a duty to respond to these vicious attacks.”

National security adviser Jake Sullivan said there are 20 American citizens unaccounted for, at least some of whom are Hamas hostages. That puts the U.S. government in uncharted territory as it seeks the safe return of large numbers of its citizens from Gaza. Biden said Monday that he had directed his team members to work with their Israeli counterparts on “every aspect of the hostage crisis.”

Americans killed or missing in the attacks include tourists visiting Israel, U.S. citizens serving in the Israeli army, people born in the U.S. who immigrated to Israel and children born in Israel to American parents who then acquired U.S. citi-

zenship, like Katsman. They range in age from 18 to 80. It is unclear whether any American citizens have been killed by Israeli military action in Gaza.

Judith Raanan, 59, and her daughter Natalie, 18, live in Evanston, Ill., and were visiting relatives at a kibbutz near Gaza. Natalie had just graduated from Deerfield High School, where she is known as a talented artist. On Saturday, Natalie’s father, Uri, received a message from his daughter that said they were under attack. Then nothing, relatives said, weeping as they spoke with a reporter.

Americans were also among the revelers at an open-air trance music festival that turned into a scene of carnage. Danielle Ben-Senior, 34, was born in Los Angeles and later moved to Israel so her ailing parents could be closer to family members, said her cousin Riki Ben-Senior. Early Saturday, Danielle, who had worked as an intensive-care nurse during the pandemic, left Tel Aviv with a group of friends to attend the music festival.

“This is the first time in so long she was going to just relax and dance,” said Riki, who still holds out hope for Danielle’s re-

turn. She is a “tough cookie,” her cousin said.

Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, left home late Friday night with a backpack and a sleeping bag on his way to the music festival, called Tribe of Nova. The next morning, his mother, Rachel Goldberg, checked her phone.

At 8:11 a.m., her son had sent two messages via WhatsApp.

“I love you,” the first read. The next one said: “I’m sorry.”

His parents haven’t heard from him since.

Goldberg-Polin was born in California and his parents grew up in Chicago. They learned from eyewitnesses that he fled the festival in a car and sought safety in a public bomb shelter. About 30 people were in the small cement structure when they were attacked by militants, who threw grenades and fired weapons. Then they told anyone who could stand to walk outside.

A witness saw Goldberg-Polin walk out, his mother said. He was missing his arm from his elbow down and had improvised a tourniquet. He was loaded onto a pickup truck with three other young men and two women. Israeli police traced the last signal from his cellphone to the border with Gaza.

Israel forms war-time Cabinet to oversee fight

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and a leading opposition figure on Wednesday created a war-time Cabinet overseeing the fight to avenge a stunning weekend attack by Hamas militants. In the sealed-off Gaza Strip ruled by Hamas, Palestinian suffering mounted as Israeli bombardment demolished neighborhoods and the territory’s only power plant ran out of fuel.

The new Cabinet establishes a degree of unity after years of bitterly divisive politics, and as the Israeli military appears increas-

ingly likely to launch a ground offensive into Gaza. The war has already claimed at least 2,300 lives on both sides.

The Israeli government is under intense public pressure to topple Hamas after its militants stormed through a border fence Saturday and massacred hundreds of Israelis in their homes, on the streets and at an outdoor music festival. Militants in Gaza are holding an estimated 150 people taken hostage from Israel — soldiers, men, women, children and older adults.

The Cabinet, which will focus only on issues of war, will be led by Netanyahu, Ben-

ny Gantz — a senior opposition figure and former defense minister — and current Defense Minister Yoav Gallant. A former chief of a staff and another government minister were named as “observer” members.

Still, Israel’s political divisions remain. The country’s chief opposition leader, Yair Lapid, was invited to join to new Cabinet but did not immediately respond to the offer.

It appeared that the rest of Netanyahu’s existing government partners, a collection of far-right and ultra-Orthodox parties, would remain in place to handle non-war issues.

Sailor pleads guilty to giving info to China

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A U.S. Navy sailor charged with providing sensitive military information to China pleaded guilty in Los Angeles on Tuesday to conspiring with a foreign intelligence officer and receiving a bribe, federal prosecutors said.

Petty Officer Wenheng Zhao, 26, originally pleaded not guilty when he was charged Aug. 4. The Justice Department alleges that Zhao, based at Naval Base Ventura County, north of Los Angeles, conspired to collect nearly \$15,000 in bribes from a Chinese intelligence officer in exchange for information, photos and videos involving Navy exercises, operations and facilities.

The information included plans for a large-scale U.S. military exercise in the Indo-Pacif-

ic region, which detailed the location and timing of naval force movements, prosecutors said. The Chinese officer told Zhao the information was needed for maritime economic research to inform investment decisions, according to the indictment.

Zhao, who also went by the name Thomas Zhao and held a U.S. security clearance, “admitted he engaged in a corrupt scheme to collect and transmit sensitive U.S. military information to the intelligence officer in violation of his official duties,” the U.S. Attorney’s Office said in a news release Tuesday.

Zhao, of Monterey Park, Calif., faces a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison. He has been in custody since his arrest on Aug. 3.

Zhao was charged on the same day as another California-

based Navy sailor who is accused of similar crimes. But they are separate cases, and federal officials haven’t said if the two were courted or paid by the same Chinese intelligence officer as part of a larger scheme.

Jinchao Wei, a 22-year-old assigned to the San Diego-based USS Essex, is charged with providing detailed information on the weapons systems and aircraft aboard the Essex and other amphibious assault ships that act as small aircraft carriers. He pleaded not guilty in federal court in San Diego.

Last week, a former U.S. Army intelligence officer was charged in Seattle with attempting to provide classified defense information to the Chinese security services during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandem-

ic. Sgt. Joseph Daniel Schmidt, 29, was arrested Oct. 6 at San Francisco International Airport as he arrived from Hong Kong, where he had been living since March 2020, the Justice Department said.

A federal grand jury returned an indictment charging him with retention and attempted delivery of national defense information. U.S. District Court records in Seattle did not yet list an attorney representing Schmidt on the charges, and neither the U.S. attorney’s office nor the federal public defender’s office had information about whether he had a lawyer.

An FBI declaration filed in the case quoted Schmidt as telling his sister in an email that he left the U.S. because he disagreed with unspecified aspects of American policy.

Republicans pick Scalise to be new House speaker

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans nominated Rep. Steve Scalise on Wednesday to be the next House speaker and will now try to unite to elect the conservative in a floor vote after ousting Rep. Kevin McCarthy from the job.

In private balloting at the Capitol, House Republicans pushed aside Rep. Jim Jordan, the Judiciary Committee chairman, in favor of Scalise, the current majority leader, lawmakers said. The Louisiana lawmaker is seen as a hero to some after surviving a mass shooting on lawmakers at a congressional baseball game practice in 2017. He is now battling blood cancer.

Republicans who have been stalemated after McCarthy’s historic removal last week will seek to assemble their narrow House majority around Scalise in what is certain to be a close vote of the full House. Democrats are set to oppose the Republican nominee.

“I don’t know how the hell you get to 218,” said Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, referring to the majority vote typically needed in the 435-member House to become speaker. “It could be a long week.”

It’s an extraordinary moment of political chaos that has brought the House to a standstill at a time of uncertainty at home and crisis abroad, just 10 months after Republicans swept to power.

The hard-right coalition of lawmakers that ousted McCarthy, R-Calif., has shown what an oversize role a few lawmakers can have in choosing his successor.

“I am not thrilled with either choice right now,” said Rep. Ken Buck, R-Colo., who voted to oust McCarthy.

It’s unclear whether Scalise can amass the votes that would be needed from almost all Republicans to overcome the Democratic opposition.

Star witness: FTX founder hoped to be US president

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Caroline Ellison, the tech executive who ran Sam Bankman-Fried’s hedge fund while sometimes dating him, testified Tuesday that he directed her to commit crimes before his cryptocurrency empire collapsed last November. She also revealed that her former boss thought he might be U.S. president someday.

With Bankman-Fried watching from his courtroom seat, Ellison, 28, said at the New York City trial that she committed fraud, conspiracy to commit fraud and money laundering with Bankman-Fried and others as they stole from customers and investors in FTX, a company Bankman-Fried started, and lenders to his hedge fund, Alameda Research.

“He directed me to commit these crimes,” she said of Bankman-Fried.

Repeatedly, Ellison made

clear that Bankman-Fried was behind the biggest financial moves in his companies, to the point that bitcoins he created were sometimes called “Sam’s coins.”

She described him as “very ambitious” and envisioning eventually leading huge companies and using his money influentially, especially in politics.

He even thought there was a 5% chance he’d become president someday, Ellison said.

“When you say president, what are you referring to?” asked Assistant U.S. Attorney Danielle Sassoon.

“Of the United States,” Ellison answered.

Bankman-Fried, 31, could face decades in prison if he is convicted of charges lodged against him when he was brought to the United States from the Bahamas last December. He has pleaded not guilty.

Japan renaming air force as threats become 'complex'

By **SETH ROBSON**
AND **HANA KUSUMOTO**
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The Japan Air Self-Defense Force is adding to its name as potential threats from space become “more diverse, complex and advanced,” the nation’s defense minister said Tuesday at this airlift hub in western Tokyo.

The change to Air and Space Self-Defense Force is scheduled for fiscal year 2027, according to a document posted on the Defense Ministry website.

Clad in a green bomber jacket, newly appointed Defense Minister Minoru Kihara told around 100 Japanese airmen at Air Defense Command headquarters at Yokota that the threats they face have become more complicated amid advances in aircraft and missile technology.

“Today, it is extremely important for our country to respond to threats from the air,” he told reporters at the headquarters. “With the advent of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, manned and unmanned aircraft and hypersonic missiles, the threats to our country

from the air are becoming more diverse, complex and advanced.”

Japan’s air force frequently scrambles its fighters to meet Chinese and Russian aircraft approaching Japanese air space; it also tracks North Korean missile tests over the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea, including high-arching ballistic missiles that enter space.

Kihara recently returned from Washington, where he met with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Oct. 4 and discussed Japan’s plans to accelerate the acquisition of hundreds of Tomahawk missiles.

Japan approved a \$51.4 billion defense budget this fiscal year, which started in April, and plans to buy 400 Tomahawks from the United States to develop counterstrike capabilities between fiscal years 2025 and 2027.

At Yokota, the headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan, Kihara saw Japanese and American airmen working closely together, he told reporters.

To deal with threats from the air, the defense force needs to improve information gathering, communication and use of

space, Kihara said.

“Taking these points into account, the name (of Japan’s air force) will be changed to Air and Space Self-Defense Force,” he said.

The Air Self-Defense Force established a Space Operations Group last year at Fuchu Air Base, about five miles southeast of Yokota.

The U.S. Space Force is expanding its presence in Japan and may establish a headquarters at Yokota, Gen. Chance Saltzman, chief of space operations, told reporters in Tokyo on Sept. 25.

Securing the use of space is a vital issue for national defense, Kihara said Tuesday.

“We will build satellite constellations with the aim of acquiring target detection and tracking capabilities, conduct technology demonstrations aimed at improving our ability to deal with detection and tracking of hypersonic glide weapons and strengthen our space domain awareness capabilities to understand the movements of debris and untrustworthy satellites while strengthening cooperation with the United States,” he said.

US declares takeover in Niger a coup

The Washington Post

More than two months after military forces deposed Niger’s democratically elected president, the Biden administration Tuesday designated their actions a coup, a move that will slash aid and cooperation with a country that had been a rare success story in a region battling Islamist militant insurgencies.

The State Department and top U.S. policymakers had been holding out hope they could find a way to restore President Mohamed Bazoum to power, pushing for his release from the presidential residence, where he has been under military guard since late July.

The coup designation — months after other countries, including Niger’s former colonial ruler, France, started using that term — was a sign that the Biden administration has lost hope of winning a quick reversal.

The military junta is led by the former head of the presidential guard, Gen. Abdourahmane Tchiani, and calls itself the National Council for Safeguarding the Homeland.

In August, Tchiani appointed a civilian prime minister, economist Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine, who has said he will lead consultations for a transitional government.

“The United States has concluded that a military coup d’état has taken place in Niger,” State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. “Any resumption of U.S. assistance will require action by the National Council for Safeguarding the Homeland to usher in democratic governance in a quick and credible timeframe.”

More than \$500 million in U.S. aid is now on hold, Miller said.

Typhoon Bolaven heads for open ocean

By **ALEX WILSON**
Stars and Stripes

Typhoon Bolaven strengthened Wednesday after a close call with Guam the previous day, pulling away from the island but leaving its communities, roadways and military bases intact.

Guam was all clear at 10 a.m., the Governor’s Office said in a news release Wednesday. The island reverted to Condition of Readiness 4, Guam’s lowest ty-

phoon preparatory status.

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero found the island’s major thoroughfares were “clear of any major debris and accessible” on Wednesday morning, according to the release.

Military bases on the island also “fared well,” with no major damage reported and no impact on operations, according to Joint Region Marianas, which oversees the island’s military installations.

At Naval Base Guam, the “majority of services,” including the commissary and exchange, were open for business, base spokeswoman Theresa Cepeda said by email.

Marine Corps Camp Blaz, also making final post-storm surveys, had found no impact on its operations, base spokeswoman Maj. Diann Rosenfeld said. The island’s Department of Defense Education Activity schools were set to open Thursday.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Historic schooner's mast fall onto deck, killing 1

ME ROCKLAND — The main mast of a historic excursion vessel splintered and fell onto the deck Monday, killing one person and injuring three others aboard the schooner Grace Bailey off the coast of Maine, officials said.

A nearby Coast Guard vessel began evacuating the injured passengers within minutes of the mast's catastrophic failure and collapse on the deck, which occurred while the schooner was returning from a four-day cruise, the vessel's owner said in a statement.

Thirty-three people were on board the schooner, which was about 1 mile east of the Rockland harbor, the Coast Guard said.

One person died from injuries and three people were transported to hospitals Monday, the Rockland Fire Department said. A helicopter transported one of the injured, while the other two were transported to a local hospital, fire officials said.

Library mistakenly adds kids' book to explicit list

AL HUNTSVILLE — An Alabama public library mistakenly added a children's picture book to a list of potentially inappropriate titles because the author's last name is "Gay," the library's director said.

"Read Me a Story, Stella," a children's picture book by Canadian author Marie-Louise Gay, was added to a list of books flagged for potential removal from the children's section of

the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library because of "sexually explicit" content.

But the book, which is about a pair of siblings reading together and building a dog house, should not have been on the list and was only added because of the keyword "gay," Cindy Hewitt, the library's executive director told AL.com on Sunday.

The book was one of 233 books set to be reviewed and potentially moved.

Court votes to limit eviction records

WI MADISON — The Wisconsin Supreme Court voted Monday in its first public administrative conference in more than a decade to reduce from 20 years to two years the time when most eviction records must be kept on the state court website.

The change was sought by tenant rights advocates who argued that the longer record-keeping has made it more difficult for people with lower incomes to find housing.

The court voted 4-3, with liberals in support and conservatives against, for shortening the record-keeping on the state court website, commonly referred to by the acronym CCAP.

Legal Action of Wisconsin sought the change for cases where there is no money judgment against a tenant. At a hearing last month, tenant advocates said the change would help renters with eviction histories, since many landlords rely solely on the statewide court website for determining whether to rent to someone.

Justice Brian Hagedorn dissented. He questioned closing off public access to the records,

which he also said would pose an administrative burden for court officials.

Florida settles lawsuit over COVID data

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida will have to provide COVID-19 data to the public again after a former Democratic state representative settled a lawsuit with Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration over the decision two years ago to stop posting information on the virus' spread online.

Then-Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith sued after the Department of Health denied his public records request for COVID-19 data in 2021 and announced the settlement Monday.

He was joined by the Florida Center for Government Accountability.

The settlement requires the department to provide COVID-19 data to the public for the next three years, including weekly statistics on cases, deaths and vaccinations by county, age group, gender and race, Smith said in a news release.

The state must also pay more than \$152,000 in legal fees to cover the plaintiffs' legal costs.

Nuclear plant gets warning over cracked pipe

SC JENKINSVILLE — Federal officials have issued a warning about a substantial safety violation at a South Carolina nuclear plant after cracks were discovered again in a backup emergency fuel line.

Small cracks have been found a half-dozen times in the past 20 years in pipes that carry fuel to emergency generators that provide cooling water for a reactor if electricity fails at the V.C. Summer plant near Columbia, according to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The agency issued what it calls a preliminary "yellow" warning to plant owner Dominion Energy last week.

It is the second most serious category and only seven similar warnings have been issued across the country since 2009, nuclear power expert David Lochbaum told The State newspaper after reviewing records from federal regulators.

Pumpkin weighing 2,749 pounds sets world record

CA HALF MOON BAY — A Minnesota horticulture teacher set a world record in California on Monday for the heaviest pumpkin after growing a giant jack-o'-lantern gourd weighing 2,749 pounds.

Travis Gienger of Anoka, Minn., won the 50th World Championship Pumpkin Weigh-Off in Half Moon Bay, Calif., with an enormous, lumpy, orange pumpkin that could produce at least 687 pies.

"I was not expecting that. It was quite the feeling," said Gienger, 43, who has been growing pumpkins for nearly 30 years and last year set a new U.S. record for growing a giant gourd.

The previous world record for heaviest pumpkin was set by a grower in Italy who produced a 2,702-pound squash in 2021, according to Guinness World Records.

— From wire reports



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Rangers sweep O's; 1st ALCS berth since 2011

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Corey Seager is still going deep in Texas during the postseason. This time he is doing it for the Rangers, who are streaking through October.

Seager and Adolis García homered early, Nathan Eovaldi pitched seven smooth innings in another playoff clincher and Texas completed an AL Division Series sweep of the Baltimore Orioles with a 7-1 victory in Game 3 on Tuesday night.

The Rangers, whose loss at Seattle on the last day of the regular season made them a wild-card team instead of the AL West champion, have since won all five of their postseason games. They are headed to the American League Championship Series for the first time since 2011.

"We had our work cut out going on the road against Tampa and Baltimore. Just shows the toughness with this ballclub and the deal with having to fly to Tampa," said Texas manager

Bruce Bochy, a three-time World Series champion with San Francisco who is now going to his first ALCS. "Trust me, they wanted to win one more game in the worst way. Didn't happen. ... They put it behind them."

Baltimore won an AL-high 101 games and was never swept in a series during the regular season, but the surprise AL East champions are done after a sweep at the most inopportune time. The Orioles have lost eight playoff games in a row over the past 10 seasons.

"Really proud of our group. They defied all the odds. Nobody gave us a chance," Baltimore manager Brandon Hyde said. "These guys played their butts off for six months. We just didn't play well for these last three, unfortunately."

Seager pulled a 445-foot drive into the right-field seats in the first inning, and García's three-run homer — one the All-Star slugger admired while taking a few slow steps out of the batter's

box — made it 6-0 in the second to chase Orioles right-hander Dean Kremer, the Israeli-American pitcher making his first career postseason start.

"We've just been playing good ball," Seager said. "Can't say enough about what our pitching staff has been able to do."

It was the first Rangers playoff game at Globe Life Field, the stadium that was brand new in 2020 when it hosted much of MLB's neutral postseason during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Los Angeles Dodgers spent most of that October there, and Seager was the MVP in both the NLCS and World Series. A year later, when Texas was coming off a 102-loss season, the shortstop signed a \$325 million, 10-year deal with the Rangers — and he occupies the same locker he did during that most unusual postseason with limited attendance.

With a full house for his first home playoff game with the

Rangers, after they had won the first two ALDS games in Baltimore following a Wild Card Series sweep at Tampa Bay, Seager sent the record sellout crowd of 40,861 into a frenzy when he connected in his first at-bat. He went deep seven times for the Dodgers there in 2020.

"That's what he does. He's done it before in the big moments," said Marcus Semien, the second baseman who signed with Texas for \$175 million over seven years the same week as Seager's deal. "He picks his game up in the playoffs. It'll be really fun to see what he can do as we move on."

Nathaniel Lowe also homered for Texas, a solo shot in the sixth. Lowe had led off the Rangers' five-run second inning with a lineout to left, but that came on the 15th pitch of the at-bat after fouling off nine two-strike pitches.

"I saw a team that was really motivated," Bochy said. "The offense, everybody was doing something to contribute."

Astros launch 4 homers, rout Twins for 2-1 series lead

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Late-afternoon shadows made the ball difficult to pick up, and Minnesota's Sonny Gray presented a tough opponent on the mound.

The Houston Astros just powered their way through and produced yet another October masterpiece.

José Abreu hit a three-run homer for Houston in a four-run first inning against Gray and piled on with a two-run shot in the ninth, carrying the Astros past the Twins 9-1 on Tuesday for a 2-1 AL Division Series lead.

Yordan Alvarez hit his fourth home run in three games and Alex Bregman had a homer and an RBI single for the defending World Series champions, who took charge from their first at-bat and moved within one win of a seventh consecutive AL Championship Series appearance. Astros starter Cristian Javier took it from there with nine strikeouts in five scoreless innings.

"It was kind of just pass the torch to the next guy," said Bregman, who has 16 postseason homers. "Put together a good at-bat and grind it out."

Game 4 was at Target Field on Wednesday. If the Twins forced Game 5, it would be in Houston on Friday.

"This was one of the reasons why I signed with this organization, to be in the best situation and compete," said Abreu, who set his low with a .237 average this season, nearly 50 points below his career mark.

Splitting the first two games in Houston gave the Twins home-field advantage, and they sold out both games three days in advance. Johan Santana threw out the ceremonial first pitch to Joe Mauer, and the crowd the Twins credited for carrying them to a two-game sweep of Toronto in the AL Wild Card Series was roaring from the start.

The Astros were hardly going to be fazed by the environment. They went 51-30 on

the road, the third-best record in the major leagues, and have made October games quite a habit since their run started in 2017.

"It's a very confident club, not a cocky club. We don't showboat too much. We just play," manager Dusty Baker said. "The guys have a knack of picking each other up."

Javier had a 4.56 ERA that was by far his worst in four big league seasons and failed to finish five innings in five of his prior 11 starts, but the Astros weren't concerned.

"He has a slow heartbeat. He wants the baseball," Bregman said. "He's a competitor and we have all the confidence in the world in him every single time he takes the mound."

The right-hander, who threw six hitless innings in World Series Game 4 last year to beat Philadelphia, lowered his career postseason ERA to 1.91 over 37⅓ innings.

"Their guy did what I didn't do. He executed pitches in spots with runners on," Gray said.

Bedard dishes assist in win over Pens

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Connor Bedard skated into the faceoff circle, saw one of his idols standing across from him and tried to soak in the moment.

That really was Sidney Crosby within arm's reach. That really was referee Kelly Sutherland welcoming him to the NHL on national television. That really was a sellout crowd pulling cameras out trying to capture the meeting of two generational talents at opposite ends of their careers.

Then the puck dropped, and the instincts that have made the 18-year-old Bedard the NHL's next big thing kicked in.

Playing with a charismatic fearlessness, Bedard dazzled in Chicago's 4-2 comeback win over Crosby and the Penguins on Tuesday night.

The top pick in the draft picked up an assist and fired five shots at Tristan Jarry while playing 21:29, hardly looking intimidated by the stage, the stakes or pretty much anything else.

"I think, for me, it's just trying

to get better every shift, every game," Bedard said. "I created a bit. There's obviously things I can get better at. But felt pretty good."

Looked pretty good too. Penguins defenseman Kris Letang gave Bedard a couple of "welcome to the NHL hits," not in an attempt to send a message but because at times it was the only way to keep up with Bedard.

"He's so good, so shifty," Letang said. "He's got great moves. I had to play him hard. He's really deceptive. You can't even look at the puck one second, because he's so fast."

Chicago trailed 2-0 when Crosby began his 19th season by scoring his 551st career goal, a shot into an open net off a pass from Jake Guentzel 11:56 into the second period.

The Blackhawks roared back behind a goal from Ryan Donato — with a secondary assist from Bedard — in the second period and Cole Guttman's goal midway through the third. Jason Dickinson gave Chicago the lead with 4:31 remaining. Nick Foligno's empty-netter with

1:33 to go sent most of the sellout crowd that came to watch one of the NHL's brightest stars take on one of its newest home.

"I feel like that was a complete game," Dickinson said. "We played the full 60. We stuck to our game plan. We played a hard game. It's nice when you get rewarded."

Petr Mrazek stopped 38 shots for the Blackhawks.

Crosby and Bryan Rust scored for the Penguins.

Bedard's arrival in the NHL had been anticipated for years, much like Crosby's when the Penguins grabbed him with the top overall selection in 2005, all of 13 days after Bedard was born. His arrival in Chicago has given the beleaguered franchise a much-needed jolt even though there almost certainly will be some growing pains on a team that's missed the playoffs five of the last six seasons as the dynasty that won three Stanley Cups between 2010-15 faded.

Like Crosby, Bedard seems at ease with the attention that has followed him from childhood prodigy to the NHL. He joked

during the morning skate that he slept "like a baby." He sprinted onto the ice with fellow Blackhawks rookie Kevin Korchinski during warmups, the two teenagers having the rink to themselves momentarily as is tradition for players making their NHL debuts.

Bedard was fidgety during the national anthem, his legs in constant motion, eager to get a moment he'd been dreaming about since he was a phenom growing up in British Columbia, Canada.

While he didn't win that opening faceoff — he didn't win many, going just 2 for 13 on draws — once the puck was in motion, Bedard was frequently a blur.

He recorded the first shot of his career just over six minutes in on a one-timer with Chicago on the power play. He kept right on pumping pucks at Jarry, his No. 98 constantly in motion. He was unafraid to fling his 5-foot-10, 185-pound frame into tight spaces, be they the front of the net or the corners.

Knights raise Cup banner, beat Kraken in opener

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Jonathan Marchessault scored, Adin Hill made 23 saves and the Stanley Cup champion Vegas Golden Knights beat the Seattle Kraken 4-1 on Tuesday night after a banner-raising ceremony.

Conn Smythe winner Marchessault scored in the first game of the season for the fourth straight year and the fifth time in seven seasons with Vegas.

Chandler Stephenson, Ivan Barbashev and Jack Eichel also scored for the Golden Knights.

The Golden Knights improved to 6-1-0 in home openers, their only loss coming in 2018 to Philadelphia. Vegas has outscored their visitors 26-14 in

those games.

Jared McCann scored Seattle's lone goal. Philipp Grubauer made 24 saves.

Vegas got the scoring going early in the first period when Mark Stone, Brett Howden and Stephenson played tic-tac-toe in the offensive zone. As they crossed the blue line, Stone went cross-ice with a pass to Howden, who sent the puck to the crease where Stephenson was there for the finish.

The Golden Knights made it 2-0 when Seattle's Brandon Tanev went to clear the puck past the goal, but Marchessault nicked it off course and past Grubauer.

Barbashev connected on a breakaway snapper 1:20 into the

second period to make it 3-0. Seattle answered midway through the period when McCann's wrist shot from the slot sailed past Hill.

The Kraken had an ample opportunity midway into the third, when Howden was called for a match penalty after he delivered a shot to Tanev's head. But just as he did in standing tall during the Golden Knights' Stanley Cup run, Hill was outstanding in making six saves during the penalty kill.

"I thought our penalty kill did an excellent job," Hill said. "It was kind of an area of emphasis during camp, just trying to work on it and kind of be aggressive and err on the side of aggression. I thought we did that to-

night and I thought our penalty kill was outstanding. Of course they're going to get a couple looks, but yeah, we did a good job limiting it."

Lightning 5, Predators 3: Jonas Johansson made 29 saves in his first start in place of the injured Andrei Vasilevskiy and host Tampa Bay beat Nashville.

Johansson was signed to be Vasilevskiy's backup. Vasilevskiy had back surgery two weeks ago and is expected to miss another six to eight weeks.

Brandon Hagel converted a penalty shot for Tampa Bay, Nicholas Paul had two power-play goals and Nikita Kucherov also scored twice. Brayden Point had three assists, and captain Steven Stamkos added an assist.

Broncos ignoring long losing streak to Chiefs

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — Nobody on the Denver Broncos' roster or coaching staff was with the team the last time they defeated the Kansas City Chiefs way back on Sept. 17, 2015.

The Broncos scored touchdowns nine seconds apart in the final minute for a stunning 31-24 win on a Thursday night at Arrowhead Stadium in Week 2 that season.

That's the site of their game this Thursday night when the Broncos (1-4) try to snap their 15-game losing streak to the defending Super Bowl champion Chiefs (4-1).

Eight years ago, when Patrick Mahomes was still flinging footballs at Texas Tech, Peyton Manning threw a 19-yard touchdown pass to Emmanuel Sanders with 36 seconds left and Brandon McManus' extra point tied the game at 24.

Linebacker Brandon Mar-

shall poked the ball from Jamaal Charles' grasp on the ensuing kickoff and cornerback Bradley Roby scooped up the loose ball and raced 21 yards into the end zone for the game-winning touchdown with 27 seconds left.

Broncos 31, Chiefs 24.

Two months later, the Chiefs won 29-13 in Denver with Manning limited by a foot injury that would sideline him until the playoffs, when he returned to the starting lineup and helped the Broncos go on a Super Bowl run.

That's the last time the Broncos beat the Chiefs.

The Broncos are 10½-point underdogs Thursday night, according to FanDuel Sportsbook, just the fourth time in Sean Payton's coaching career his team has been a double-digit underdog.

The Broncos face the Chiefs again on Oct. 29 and if they get

swept by Kansas City for the eighth straight season, they'll be approaching the record of 20 consecutive losses against one opponent set by the Buffalo Bills, who didn't beat the Miami Dolphins a single time in the 1970s.

The Broncos, however, aren't looking back as they prepare for Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce this week.

"We gotta create a new history," Russell Wilson said Tuesday.

The Broncos have stumbled under Payton's leadership, losing their first three home games to a trio of teams — the Raiders, Commanders and Jets — who are a combined 3-9 against other opponents. Denver lost by 50 points at Miami and fell behind the Bears by three touchdowns before rallying for their only win of the season.

All of this has fueled speculation the Broncos will conduct a

fire sale of their roster ahead of the league's Halloween trade deadline with veterans such as Justin Simmons, Garrett Bolles, Frank Clark, Jerry Jeudy and Courtland Sutton being prominently mentioned.

"George and I talk every day, three, four times a day," Payton said of his constant communication with general manager George Paton. "We're not looking to do business with any of our players. That doesn't prevent teams from calling at times, and you pick the phone up but that's kind of where it's at."

Simmons, who's been with the Broncos for all but the first of their 15 consecutive losses to the Chiefs, did allow himself to ponder what it would be like to finally beat Kansas City.

"I mean, it would be huge," Simmons said, not so much to end the streak but just to give the Broncos a much-needed and long-awaited boost.

Off the charts: Dolphins, 49ers offenses dominant

Associated Press

Kyle Shanahan and Mike McDaniels spent years together scheming ways to exploit NFL defenses.

Now split apart with McDaniels in his second season coaching Miami and Shanahan in year seven in San Francisco, the two offensive coaches have their teams threatening records with their early season domination.

The 49ers and Dolphins rank 1-2 in several key offensive categories from scoring, to yards per play, to success rate, to passer rating to first downs.

Miami is the second team in NFL history to average at least 500 yards of offense a game through five games, with their 513.6 beating out the previous record of 505.4 set by the Rams in 2000.

The Dolphins are scoring 36.2 points per game for the best total at this point of the season in eight years as defenses have had no answer for the speed of players like Tyreek Hill, De'Von Achane, Jaylen Waddle or Raheem Mostert.

Miami has seven of the nine fastest speeds for ball carriers tracked by NFL NextGen

stats, led by Hill's 22.01 mph on a 64-yard catch last week. Hill also reached a speed of 20.95 mph on a 69-yard TD against the Giants last week that gave him five TDs on the season and tied him with Lance Alworth for fifth place with his 19th career TD of at least 60 yards.

Achane is on a record-setting pace of his own with his seven TDs in his first four games ranking second in NFL history to Bill Paschal's eight in 1943.

Achane has rushed for 100 yards and a TD in three straight games, tied for the second-longest streak ever for a rookie since the merger before Franco Harris' six-game streak in 1972. He is averaging 12.1 yards per carry on the season.

Mostert leads the NFL with eight TDs, making the Dolphins the second team ever with three players with at least five TDs from scrimmage in the first five games of a season. New England did it in 2011 with Rob Gronkowski, Wes Welker and BenJarvus Green-Ellis.

The Niners have been more dominant overall, becoming the ninth team in the Super Bowl era to start 5-0 with a point differ-

ential of plus-99 or better. Six of the previous eight teams to do it made the Super Bowl with Washington (1991), the Rams (1999) and Saints (2009) winning it all.

San Francisco is the sixth team to score at least 30 points in each of the first five games of a season, and their eight-game regular season streak of scoring at least 30 points ranks fifth-longest ever.

Quarterback Brock Purdy and running back Christian McCaffrey have fueled this run, with Purdy throwing a career-high four TD passes and McCaffrey running for a score in a 42-10 win over Dallas.

Purdy has won all 10 of his regular season starts with his 121.1 rating in those starts the best ever through 10 starts. He has completed 70.4% of his passes — second best to Chad Pennington's 70.8% — through 10 starts. Only Ben Roethlisberger has won more consecutive starts to begin his career with 15.

McCaffrey has TDs in 14 consecutive games in the regular season and playoffs, tied with Emmitt Smith for the fourth longest streak ever. Only Lenny Moore (17 games), O.J. Simpson (15) and John Riggins (15) have longer streaks.