

Concerns raised over Wasp-class ships

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Three Wasp-class amphibious warships have suffered mechanical problems at sea in recent months — a pattern that some defense analysts said projects a message to other countries that the U.S. Navy might be unprepared for a fight rather than a powerful fleet ready to strike.

“As these instances keep stacking up, that certainly demonstrates a pattern of unpreparedness. Any potential bad actor out there might factor that into their decision making,” said Dan Grazier, a senior fellow for the National Security Reform Program at the Stimson Center, a Washington think tank.

Naval Surface Forces Atlantic confirmed last week that the USS Iwo Jima experienced an engineering problem Sept. 5 while conducting training off the coast of Virginia. The Wasp-class amphibious ship was observed limping back to Naval Station Norfolk by Aviation and Naval Assets, a ship spotter based in Hampton Roads, Va. Three tugs met the Wasp-class ship off the coast, with a fourth joining the group further inland, according to the

ship spotter.

“The ship returned to Naval Station Norfolk under its own power to conduct repairs and is currently back underway continuing basic phase training events,” Lt. Cmdr. David Carter, a spokesman for Naval Surface Forces Atlantic, said Sept. 11.

The ship spotter speculated the issue was rudder related based on the way that the Iwo Jima moved.

“All of her turns were to port after 01:58 Zulu or 9:58 p.m. Eastern Time. From then on, there were no turns to starboard. Also, as she was approaching the pier, she was angled into the wind like the tugs couldn’t keep her from going out of the main channel,” Aviation and Naval Assets shared Sept. 5 on X.

Carter did not say if the mechanical issue was rudder related as the ship spotter suspected.

Carter indicated last week the issue was resolved, stating the Iwo Jima was back at sea conducting basic phase training events. Typically, basic phase training is conducted in preparation for deployments.

“We are fully committed to delivering amphibious warships on schedule that are properly orga-

nized, trained, equipped, evaluated, and certified to execute maritime expeditionary warfare and amphibious operations,” Carter said.

The Iwo Jima is the third Wasp-class amphibious ship to break down this year.

A different ship spotter in March said the USS Wasp came into port on one shaft due to an engineering problem. A few weeks later, Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations, said the Wasp’s deployment was likely to be delayed due to mechanical problems.

The Wasp ultimately deployed on time in June, but the news of the Wasp’s issue came about the same time that the USS Boxer was forced to make a U-turn for repairs on its long-delayed Indo-Pacific deployment. The Boxer, also a Wasp-class amphibious ship, deployed April 1 from San Diego but returned to port 10 days later because of a problem with its starboard rudder. The Navy elected to repair the rudder pier side with divers, USNI reported, and the ship returned to its deployment in July.

Wasp-class amphibious assault ships are flat-top warships that act as helicopter landing

docks at sea. The warships are also used to deploy Marine expeditionary units, which are described by the Navy and the Marine Corps as a global 911 force that responds to humanitarian crises and conflict.

“They are supposed to be out there standing by, ready to respond to any potential crisis around the world. Seeing problems like this, watching MEUs turn around and come back to port for maintenance issues is pretty disturbing,” Grazier said.

The strain of readying amphibious ships for deployment is a lingering effect of the USS Bonhomme Richard fire of 2020, according to Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, another Washington think tank. The Wasp-class Bonhomme Richard, which was undergoing maintenance in San Diego, burned for more than four days. Soon after, the ship was declared a total loss.

Eight Wasp-class amphibious ships were built, leaving the Navy with seven active ships following the loss of the Bonhomme Richard. The Navy also has two America-class amphibious assault ships, with a third under construction.

Boot camp’s senior enlisted Marine arrested, fired

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

A senior enlisted Marine was arrested by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and fired from a West Coast training command, Navy officials confirmed Monday.

Sgt. Maj. Gerardo Trevino, 38, of the 3rd Recruit Training Battalion at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego was arrested Wednesday by

the NCIS. The senior enlisted Marine is being held in pre-trial confinement while NCIS conducts “a thorough investigation,” said Darwin Lam, an NCIS spokesperson.

“Out of respect for the investigative process, NCIS will not comment further while the investigation remains ongoing,” said Lam, who did not reveal the charges facing Trevino.

Trevino was relieved of his command at the West Coast boot camp Thursday due to a “loss in trust and confidence,” according to Capt. Austin Gallegos, spokesperson for the recruiting depot. Trevino was relieved by Col. Peter Rummeler, commanding officer of the Recruit Training Regiment.

“We will remain transparent on these issues but mindful of not to interfere with adminis-

trative or legal processes,” Gallegos said.

The U.S. military routinely cites only a vague “loss of confidence” when removing leaders from authority positions.

Trevino’s biography page on the Marine Corps Recruit Depot website had been removed by Monday.

Trevino, a native of McAllen, Texas, graduated from boot camp in December 2004.

4 Russian naval vessels approach Alaska

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Coast Guard recently encountered four Russian naval vessels in U.S. waters near Point Hope, Alaska, the service said Monday.

The crew of the cutter, Stratton, on a routine patrol in the Chukchi Sea on Sunday, spotted a Russian surface action group 57 miles northwest of the city, according to a news release.

The flotilla included two submarines, a frigate and a tugboat, the Coast Guard said.

The vessels moved southeast inside Russian territory before crossing into U.S. Arctic waters to avoid sea ice. The vessels transited about 30 miles into U.S. waters,

a move permitted by international rules and customs, according to the Coast Guard.

"We are actively patrolling our maritime border in the Bering Sea, Bering Strait, and Chukchi Sea, with our largest and most capable cutters and aircraft, to protect U.S. sovereign interests, U.S. fish stocks, and to promote international maritime norms," Rear Adm. Megan Dean, commander of Coast Guard District 17, said in the release.

The 17th District encompasses more than 3,853,500 square miles and over 47,300 miles of shoreline throughout Alaska and the Arctic.

"Coast Guard Cutter Stratton ensured there were no disruptions to U.S. interests," Dean said.

The Stratton is a 418-foot Legend-class national security cutter homeported in Alameda, Calif. It is patrolling under Operation Frontier Sentinel to meet Russian and Chinese vessels operating in and around U.S. waters, according to the release.

The encounter is the latest in a series of recent incidents involving Russian forces approaching U.S. territory or that of its allies.

Two Russian IL-38 maritime patrol aircraft were tracked in the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone on Saturday, according to North American Aerospace Defense Command.

The Russian aircraft flew into the zone where the United States expects international aircraft to identify themselves but remained outside U.S. and Canadian territorial airspace.

Elements of the U.S. Army's 11th Airborne Division and the 1st and 3rd Multi Domain Task Forces deployed last week to Shemya Island in the Aleutians in response to recent Russian and Chinese air and sea probes.

Around 130 soldiers are on the nearly 3-mile-wide island 1,200 miles west of Anchorage as a "show of force" in response to the probes into the region, said Maj. Gen. Joseph Hilbert, commander of the 11th Airborne Division, which has its headquarters at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson near Anchorage.

Fallen Marine honored for bravery after Osprey crash

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps in a ceremony at the commandant's headquarters on Monday presented their highest noncombat medal to the parents of Cpl. Spencer Collart, who died in August 2023 after his V-22 Osprey crashed in Australia.

Collart, 21, survived the crash but went back into the burning aircraft to try to save the pilots, who were trapped.

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Eric Smith spoke with emotion in addressing the fallen Marine's parents, Bart and Alexia Collart, of Arlington, Va.

"You raised a Marine who in the final moments of his life thought not of himself but of his fellow Marines," Smith said. "He didn't stop to think of the fire or the danger."

The crash was one of four fatal accidents since 2022 that have drawn increased scrutiny of the Osprey, which flies both like a helicopter and an airplane.

Bart Collart called his son "one

of the best knuckleheads you ever wanted to hang out with." He said the pilots and Spencer "lost their lives while managing to save the lives of every Marine they were transporting," and he credited the pilots with leveling out the Osprey before it hit the ground, to give the 23 troops they were transporting a better chance of surviving.

The Osprey was participating in an Australian military exercise when it ended up following too closely behind the lead aircraft and maneuvered to avoid it, ultimately putting it in a fall.

Seconds after the Osprey hit the ground, Collart, the crew chief, escaped the burning aircraft "and immediately began ensuring the safety of the Marines around him," Smith said. But Capt. Eleanor LeBeau and aircraft commander Maj. Tobin Lewis were still trapped inside, and Collart went back in to try to save them. Investigators believe he may have unbuckled Lewis from his restraints.

Navy surveillance plane flies over Taiwan Strait

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. Navy surveillance aircraft flew over the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday for the first time in five months, and just days after German naval vessels made their own trip through the contentious waterway.

The P-8A Poseidon, a long-range aircraft equipped with an advanced sensor suite, flew through international airspace over the 110-mile-wide channel that separates mainland China from Taiwan, the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a news release Tuesday.

"The aircraft's transit of the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the Navy said in the release. "The United States military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows."

The flight began around 12:15 p.m. and concluded around 1 p.m., 7th Fleet spokeswoman

Cmdr. Alison Maruca said by email Tuesday.

She did not elaborate on the direction the aircraft traveled.

The U.S. routinely sends warships and, less frequently, aircraft, through the strait.

China has "sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction" over the waterway, former Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said in June 2022. He is now China's ambassador to Cambodia. Referring to the waterway as "international waters" is an attempt to manipulate China's claim over Taiwan, he said at the time.

A 7th Fleet Poseidon aircraft last flew over the strait on April 17, prompting Beijing to scramble jets to track the flight.

Tuesday's transit came four days after the German frigate Baden-Wuerttemberg and support ship Frankfurt am Main made their own transit from the East China Sea and into the South China Sea.

Navy: Race-based admissions necessary

The Baltimore Sun

BALTIMORE — An attorney for the U.S. Naval Academy said Monday that the school should continue using race and ethnicity in admissions, because it was not where it needed to be in building a diverse student body.

“Real progress is being made,” Joshua Gardner said in U.S. District Court in Baltimore. “We’re just not there yet.”

The service academy in Annapolis, Md., has been sued by Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA). The group won a victory in the U.S. Supreme Court

last year in its case against affirmative action policies at Harvard and the University of North Carolina, with the justices rejecting the use of racial and ethnic preferences in college admissions. But the high court specified in its ruling that the military’s service academies may have “distinct” interests in considering race and ethnic background, carving out a potential exemption, which SFFA is challenging.

U.S. officials have argued that a diverse leadership is necessary for cohesion within the armed ranks and is vital to na-

tional security.

But an attorney for SFFA disputed that the use of racial preferences in Naval Academy admissions would necessarily achieve such diversity.

“We’re told it’s all about making naval officers,” Adam Mortara said in his opening statement in court, noting that just 28% of naval officers graduated from the academy, so the impact of affirmative action there would ultimately be minimal.

The admissions group presented its first witness, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Christopher S. Walker, to provide boots-

on-the-ground support for its argument against racial and ethnic considerations.

Walker, who is Black and graduated from his service’s academy, went through his 40 years in uniform, deploying to multiple combat zones and serving in operational and command positions.

He was asked by an SFFA attorney repeatedly about what impact race played in his units’ lethality and effectiveness, or how he chose who to add to a crew.

His answer, repeatedly: “Not a bit.”

Report says construction delays doubled in 5 years

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

The number of military construction projects delayed for more than a year has doubled in the last five years and the problem could be mitigated through better oversight from the Defense Department, according to a new government watchdog report.

The Government Accountability Office found the number of projects delayed jumped from 73 to 158 from 2019 to 2024. More so, 25% of all projects in that time delayed for at least a year, which can happen for a variety of reasons, and can increase the construction costs of the project by millions of dollars. GAO investigators focused their review largely on the design phase of projects that is typically overseen by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command.

The Defense Department closely watched a handful of high-profile projects but heavily relied on those two organizations to monitor progress. Some facilities included in military construction are child care facilities, aircraft hangars, roads and barracks.

“We definitely think more oversight is needed here given the magnitude of the issue,” said Alis-

sa Czyz, director the defense capabilities and management team at GAO.

She authored the report released Monday titled “Military Construction: Better Information Sharing Would Improve DOD’s Oversight.”

At the close of fiscal 2023, which ended Sept. 30 of that year, the military had about 598 ongoing construction projects worth more than \$28 billion, according to the report.

Military officials have requested \$15 billion in funding for fiscal 2025 for new construction.

The report highlighted some of the majorly delayed projects across the military, such as a communications and crypto facility at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii that was supposed to be completed in April 2021 for a total of \$49.8 million.

Construction is ongoing and the cost for the project has grown to \$124 million, in part because of design errors, material delays and issues with heating and cooling systems.

The financial costs of delayed construction don’t quantify the loss to operations from the stalled projects when new facilities are put on hold as building drags on. The Hawaii facility is meant to

improve the Navy’s ability to conduct information warfare missions.

The delays also contribute to other ongoing problems such as the shortage of child care facilities and housing for junior enlistees.

A GAO report last year found junior troops were suffering with poor living conditions in barracks and dorms.

Problems included sewage overflow, mold, water-quality issues, rodent infestations, broken air conditioning and missing kitchenettes. Some installations, such as Fort Cavazos in Texas, do not have enough rooms in barracks, which has forced some soldiers to double up.

As the military services wait for new child care facilities, officials have had to get creative with unused space on bases to reduce the wait lists for care. At Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland, officials converted an old conference center into a youth center.

Czyz said investigators tried to pin down a reason why the number of delayed construction projects continues to increase but found there were so many contributing factors that they could not find a clear answer.

For road construction at Camp Lejeune, N.C., the project was delayed for more than two years in part because of significant rainfall and contractors striking a utility pipe that they were unaware existed at the site.

Officials told the GAO that the design phase didn’t include a completed survey with data about utilities, and a 24-inch water line was discovered during construction.

“[Navy] officials emphasized that a lesson learned from this project could be to invest more money into quality surveys at the beginning of the project rather than dealing with issues during construction,” according to the report.

The report offered seven recommendations to improve oversight that focused on better documentation, analysis and review of projects to track trends and lessons learned, as well as training personnel to document post-project reviews and validate the information.

Michael Rosenblatt, director of military construction at the Pentagon, wrote to the GAO that the Defense Department agreed with the recommendations. However, he did not provide a timeline to implement them.

'Diddy' indicted on sex trafficking charges

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Sean “Diddy” Combs presided over a sordid empire of sexual crimes, coercing and abusing women for years, threatening them to keep them in line and enlisting a cast of aides to cover it up, according to an indictment unsealed Tuesday.

The music mogul “engaged in a persistent and pervasive pattern of abuse toward women and other individuals,” including physical violence, in order “to fulfill his sexual desires, protect his reputation, and conceal his conduct, according to the indictment.

It describes him inducing female victims and male sex workers into drugged-up, sometimes dayslong sexual performances dubbed “Freak Offs.” It

also refers obliquely to an attack on his former girlfriend, the R&B singer Cassie, that was captured on video.

Combs was arrested late Monday in Manhattan, roughly six months after federal authorities conducting a sex trafficking investigation raided his luxurious homes in Los Angeles and Miami. He was due in court Tuesday.

Over the past year, the hip-hop impresario has been sued by people who say he subjected them to physical or sexual abuse.

He has denied many of those allegations, and his lawyer, Marc Agnifilo, said outside the courthouse Tuesday morning that Combs would plead not guilty.

“His spirits are good. He’s

confident,” said the attorney, who pledged to “fight like hell” to get his client released pending trial.

The indictment describes Combs, the 54-year-old founder of Bad Boy Records, as the head of a criminal enterprise that engaged or attempted to engage in sex trafficking, forced labor, interstate transportation for purposes of prostitution, drug offenses, kidnapping, arson, bribery and obstruction of justice. He’s accused of striking, punching and dragging women on numerous occasions, throwing objects and kicking them — and enlisting his personal assistants, security and household staff to help him hide it all.

Combs and his associates wielded his “power and prestige” to “intimidate, threaten,

and lure” women into his orbit, “often under the pretense of a romantic relationship,” the indictment says.

It says he then would use force, threats and coercion to get the women to engage with male sex workers in the “Freak Offs” — “elaborate and produced sex performances” that Combs arranged, directed, masturbated during and often recorded.

During a search of Combs’ homes in Miami and Los Angeles this year, law enforcement seized narcotics and more than a thousand bottles of baby oil and lubricant, according to the indictment. Agents also seized firearms and ammunition, including three AR-15s with defaced serial numbers, the indictment said.

Hezbollah hit by lethal wave of exploding pagers

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Hundreds of handheld pagers exploded near simultaneously in parts of Lebanon and Syria on Tuesday, killing at least nine people — including members of the militant group Hezbollah and a young girl — and wounding several thousand, officials said. They pointed the finger at Israel in what appeared to be a sophisticated, remote attack.

Among those wounded was Iran’s ambassador to Lebanon. The mysterious incident came amid rising tensions between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah, which have exchanged fire across the Israel-Lebanon border since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that sparked the war in Gaza.

The pagers that exploded had been newly acquired by Hezbollah after the group’s leader ordered members to stop using cellphones, warning they could be tracked by Israeli intelli-

gence. A Hezbollah official told The Associated Press the pagers were a new brand the group had not used before.

At about 3:30 p.m. local time on Tuesday, pagers started heating up and then exploding in the pockets and hands of those carrying them — particularly in a southern Beirut suburb and the Beqaa region of eastern Lebanon where Hezbollah has a strong presence, and in Damascus, where several Hezbollah members were wounded, Lebanese security officials and a Hezbollah official said. The Hezbollah official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press.

The AP reached out to the Israeli military, which declined to comment.

The explosions came hours after Israel’s internal security agency said it foiled an attempt by Hezbollah to kill a former senior Israeli security official.

Trump, Harris campaign in battleground states

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Presidential election campaigning revved back up Tuesday, with Donald Trump heading to Michigan and Vice President Kamala Harris answering questions at a forum for Black journalists in Pennsylvania — even as authorities continue to investigate a second apparent assassination attempt against Trump that’s roiled the race. Ryan Wesley Routh, suspect in the shooting, is in custody.

Trump is holding a town hall in Flint, Mich., and has appearances later in the week in New York, Washington and North Carolina. Harris will participate in a Philadelphia gathering of the National Association of Black Journalists.

She skipped the group’s recent gathering in Chicago, but an openly antagonistic appearance there by Trump sparked an uproar when he questioned the vice president’s racial identity.

Harris has her own stops in Washington, as well as Michigan and Wisconsin, planned in coming days, with both sides zeroing in on the industrial Midwest and Pennsylvania and North Carolina — all battleground areas that could swing an election expected to be close.

Trump has claimed that months of criticisms against him by Harris and President Joe Biden inspired the latest attack. That’s despite the former president’s own long history of inflammatory campaign rhetoric and advocacy for jailing or prosecuting his political enemies. Both Biden and Harris have so far avoided politics in reacting to the attack.

Harris has condemned political violence while Biden has called on Congress to increase funding to the Secret Service.

Subsequently arrested, Routh’s past online posts suggest the suspect has not been consistent about his politics.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Child trapped between two boulders is rescued

NH WINDSOR — Rescuers came to the aid of a child who became wedged between two boulders and was trapped for more than nine hours, a New Hampshire fire chief said Monday.

The child, estimated to be 11 or 12, was pried out of the boulders in Windsor at about 3:15 a.m. and taken to a hospital for evaluation, WMUR-TV reported. Windsor is about 30 miles west of Concord, the state capital.

The boulders are near the Wediko School, a residential treatment center for boys in middle school and high school.

Hillsborough Fire Department Chief Kenny Stafford told the station firefighters got a call to respond shortly before 6 p.m. Sunday. They used ropes and a lubricant to rescue the child.

2 ex-fire chiefs arrested in corruption scandal

NY NEW YORK — Two former New York City Fire Department chiefs were in custody Monday on charges that they solicited tens of thousands of dollars in bribes before ensuring the department's fire prevention bureau provided preferential treatment to some individuals and companies.

Anthony Saccavino and Brian Cordasco were arrested on bribery, corruption and false statements charges alleging that they solicited and accepted the bribe payments from at least 2021 through 2023, authorities said.

An indictment against the men in Manhattan federal court

said they were former chiefs for the New York City Fire Department Bureau of Fire Prevention. The bureau is responsible for regulating the installation of fire safety and suppression systems throughout New York City and ensuring fire safety regulations are obeyed.

County can keep windfall after claim lands day late

MI DETROIT — A woman has lost a legal tangle involving the calendar, mailboxes and a foreclosed house, leaving a Michigan county with a \$21,810 windfall.

The state Court of Appeals affirmed a lower court and ruled in favor of Iron County in a lawsuit over cash remaining from the sale of a property that was saddled with unpaid taxes.

There is no dispute that Lillian Joseph could pursue the surplus money. Her claim was delivered at 8:17 a.m. on deadline day, July 1, 2021, but the envelope wasn't handled by the treasurer's office until the next day.

Iron County government has more than 20 office suites, and each has its own locked mailbox. Joseph's envelope didn't list suite 12 so it didn't immediately land with the treasurer on July 1.

"The mailroom is not the treasurer's office," attorney Laurie Longo, representing the county, said during arguments earlier this summer.

Young climate activists seeking to revive lawsuit

OR EUGENE — Young climate activists in Oregon have asked the U.S. Supreme Court to revive their long-running lawsuit against

the federal government in which they argued they have a constitutional right to a climate that sustains life.

Their petition asks the high court to reverse a rejection of the lawsuit issued by a federal appeals court panel earlier this year, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported. It seeks to have the ruling thrown out and the case sent back to federal court in Oregon so it can go to trial.

The landmark case was filed in 2015 by 21 plaintiffs who were between the ages of 8 and 18 at the time.

The suit was challenged repeatedly by the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations, whose lawyers argued it sought to direct federal environmental and energy policies through the courts instead of the political process.

In May, a three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, acting on a request from the Biden administration, directed U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken in Eugene, Ore., to dismiss the case.

Protections for gray wolves could be lifted

MT BILLINGS — The Biden administration asked an appeals court to revive a Trump-era rule that lifted remaining Endangered Species Act protections for gray wolves in the U.S.

If successful, the move would put the predators under state oversight nationwide and open the door for hunting to resume in the Great Lakes region after it was halted two years ago under court order.

Environmentalists had successfully sued when protections for wolves were lifted in former

President Donald Trump's final days in office.

The filing with the 9th U.S. District Court of Appeals was President Joe Biden administration's first explicit step to revive that rule. Protections will remain in place pending the court's decision.

Invalid signatures on pot ballot petitions alleged

NE OMAHA — Nebraska certified two ballot measures Friday to legalize medical marijuana even though the state's Republican attorney general said their supporters may have submitted at least several thousand invalid signatures, which could keep them from becoming law.

Attorney General Mike Hilgers made the statement during a Zoom news conference with a local prosecutor to announce a felony charge against a local petition circulator over fraudulent signatures. A deputy sheriff said in a sworn statement that there were problems with 164 signatures on 38 pages of the petitions for the proposals.

The deputy's affidavit also said the man was paid by the hour to collect signatures and submitted more than 100 petition pages. According to the deputy, the man acknowledged signing some names himself, copying them from a telephone book and making up people's birth dates.

But those issues are not keeping the measures off the November ballot so far. Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen, also a Republican, certified both Friday, the last day possible, saying they appeared to have enough signatures.

— From wire reports

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Cousins, Falcons stun Eagles with late drive

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Oh, so this was what Atlanta expected out of \$180 million lavished on Kirk Cousins.

Certainly not a shaky effort like the 36-year-old veteran had in the opener, raising concerns in the loss about the quarterback's return to form from a torn Achilles tendon.

Cousins calmed fears down the stretch and made all the clutch throws in Philadelphia that his counterpart Jalen Hurts could not — and sent the Falcons home winners.

Cousins led a flawless last-minute drive for Atlanta and connected with Drake London for a 7-yard touchdown with 34 seconds left to give the Falcons a 22-21 victory over the Eagles on Monday night.

"He went out and played important in the biggest moments in the biggest times," Falcons coach Raheem Morris said. "Those are things you want to have happen when you have a chance to go out there and get wins. It was great to see today with Kirk Cousins."

Saquon Barkley dropped a short pass that stopped the clock with 1:46 left and forced the Eagles to settle for a field goal instead of a game-sealing first down. That was plenty of time for Cousins — especially against an Eagles defense playing soft coverage with a nonexistent pass rush.

Cousins, playing his second game since tearing his Achilles tendon last Oct. 29 while playing for Minnesota, shook off an uneven effort and hit Darnell Mooney for 21 and 26 yards on consecutive plays during the decisive drive.

Cousins found London on a short pass to his right and he torched Darius Slay for the tying score, and Youngblood Koo put Atlanta (1-1) on top with a 48-yard extra point after London was flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct. The go-ahead drive took just 65 seconds.

"We saved just enough time for those guys to go down and march down and get that game-winning touchdown," Morris said.

Cousins was 5-for-6 for 70 yards on the final drive.

"That's how you put together a great season," Cousins said. "When you have these games that could go either way, you find a way to have it break your way. That's the way this league is and so when we can find those inches, it can really change the tale of the season."

Hurts had his final pass intercepted by Jessie Bates III to seal Atlanta's win and set off a wild celebration on the sideline.

The Eagles (1-1) went ahead on Hurts' 1-yard tush push score with 6:47 left. Barkley finished with 95 yards on 22 carries in his home debut for Philadelphia, but his drop provided the Falcons with some hope.

And then Cousins started playing like the QB Atlanta thought it was getting when it signed him to a four-year, \$180 million contract.

Cousins finished 20-for-29 for 241 yards and two touchdowns. Atlanta's first TD was a 41-yarder from Cousins to Mooney, who finished with three catches for 88 yards.

All critical plays leading up to the final drive.

"When you're down six, you can certainly go for broke, but we just tried to take what they gave us and move our way down the field," Cousins said. "And we were able to get some chunks that basically got us down there, low enough where the clock wasn't really our enemy."

Hurts was 23-for-30 for 183 yards, including a touchdown pass to DeVonta Smith. With No. 1 receiver A.J. Brown out with a hamstring injury, Smith led the Eagles with seven catches for 76 yards and a score.

Jake Elliott kicked two field goals for the Eagles. His 28-yarder with 1:39 left made it 21-15.

Atlanta kept stalling in the red zone, getting three field goals from Koo, before Cousins fired over the middle to Mooney, who shook loose from C.J. Gardner-Johnson and left him on the turf before he somersaulted into the end zone with 1:21 left in the third quarter for a 15-10 lead. Cousins failed on the 2-point conversion pass.

Panthers bench Young; Dalton takes over at QB

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Carolina Panthers had hoped that Bryce Young would put an end to their ever-churning quarterback carousel when they selected him No. 1 overall last year.

But two games into his second season, Young has been benched and the Panthers are back to another journeyman quarterback. Andy Dalton, 36, will take over the offense Sunday when the Panthers (0-2) visit the Las Vegas Raiders.

"I'm really excited for this opportunity," Dalton said with a big smile.

"When I came here, I wasn't sure if I was going to get another opportunity to start again. I'm really looking forward to it. I'm excited about what's ahead. It's a tough situation. I've been on both sides of it and it's hard for everybody. But for me, I'm looking forward to it."

This may be Dalton's wish, but it wasn't the Panthers'.

They wanted — in fact, needed — Young to succeed after giving up four draft picks and wide receiver D.J. Moore to move up eight spots in the draft to get him. But Young is 2-16 as an NFL starter with more interceptions than touchdowns and the fan base has grown irritable and apathetic following the constant losing.

No team has a worse record (31-70) than the Panthers since 2018.

It's no coincidence that Carolina's struggles began shortly after shoulder and ankle injuries caught up with franchise quarterback Cam Newton in 2016. The Panthers made the playoffs in 2017, but lost in the first round.

They haven't been back since.

And the quarterback issue has been an issue ever since.

The Panthers have tried a number of options along the way, including several reclamation projects.

They signed free-agent Teddy Bridgewater and traded for former top draft picks Sam Darnold and Baker Mayfield. Ten quarterbacks have started for the Panthers since 2018, including Kyle Allen, Taylor Heinicke, Will Grier and P.J. Walker.

Dalton started a game last year for Carolina as an injury replacement for Young.

The 14-year NFL veteran completed 34 of 58 pass attempts for 361 yards and two touchdowns, but the Panthers lost 37-27 at Seattle. Still, it was the best the offense looked all season.

Now Dalton gets another shot, this time in an offense under new head coach and play caller Dave Canales.

"I think the way we build things and the way we do things if you can get the ball out of your hands and make quick decisions and play with timing and accuracy and anticipation, all that kind of stuff," Dalton said. "There's a lot of that in this offense."

Florida State's been biggest flop so far

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Few expected Florida State to run the table again in the Atlantic Coast Conference and coast into the expanded, 12-team College Football Playoff. Not after losing quarterback Jordan Travis, running back Trey Benson, receivers Keon Coleman and Johnny Wilson, and a handful of standout defenders.

However, no one could have seen this coming.

The Seminoles are winless after three games, the result of an erratic passing attack, a sluggish ground game and a defense that can't seem to stop the run and can't get consistent pressure on quarterbacks.

And now FSU, which was ranked No. 10 to start the season, is without question the most disappointing team in college football. And with all due respect to Clemson, Florida and Kansas, it's not even close.

"I know that it's a frustrating thing to sit there and look at, and it's frustrating for everybody involved, for those guys that are out there playing,"

Florida State coach Mike Norvell said Monday. "They want more. They want to be better. They're working hard at it. But it's some of those little things that we have to improve on and just the consistency of it."

The only thing Florida State has done consistently this season is lose — twice as a double-digit favorite (Georgia Tech and Boston College) and again as a 6½-point choice against Memphis. The Tigers got a victory against their former coach and a \$1.3 million payday.

How the 'Noles got here is easier to explain than how they might get out.

Some wonder whether last year's CFP snub is having a greater impact on the team than anyone could have imagined. But those inside the building insist it's more about execution and chemistry than psyche and history.

Florida State lost 10 players to the NFL Draft, including five selected in the first 64 picks. Norvell turned to the transfer portal for help — a place that was so kind to him while build-

ing last year's team that went 13-0 in the regular season — but former Oregon State and Clemson starting quarterback DJ Uiagalelei has fallen well short of expectations.

Uiagalelei has been so inconsistent — he's completing 56.6% of his passes with one touchdown — that the FSU faithful have started chanting for backup Brock Glenn.

And those preseason discussions about whether Florida State would make the playoff have turned to whether the Seminoles will become bowl eligible.

Six wins are difficult to find on the schedule, which continues Saturday as California (3-0) travels cross-country for its ACC debut.

While Norvell and his assistants tried to focus on details and fundamentals during a bye week before hosting Memphis, little change showed on the field and the Seminoles lost 20-12.

Florida State became the first team in college football history to start the season inside the top

10 and lose its first three games to unranked opponents. The slide has stirred speculation about Norvell's future in Tallahassee.

Norvell would be owed roughly \$65 million (85% of his remaining contract that runs through 2031) if FSU decided to fire him.

It's an unlikely path, especially for a program already spending considerable resources in hopes of escaping the ACC and potentially joining a league that would provide more long-term financial stability.

So the Seminoles might have to power through a slumping season and hope for brighter days ahead and a reboot in 2025.

Florida State is 124th in scoring offense at 15.3 points a game. The running game, viewed as a strength going into 2024, is downright dysfunctional at 2.2 yards a carry and 52 yards a game.

And the defense is allowing 24 points a game, which ranks 83rd in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

Source: AAC ramps up interest in adding Air Force

Associated Press

The American Athletic Conference has ramped up interest in adding Air Force as a member to put all three service academies into the same league for the first time, a person with knowledge of the AAC's discussions told The Associated Press on Monday.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because conference officials were not making their internal discussions public.

ESPN first reported the American was targeting Air Force, a charter member of the Mountain West, which is now the next conference in danger of being picked apart in another wave of realignment.

In a statement, the AAC declined to address possible expansion.

"In the past five months we have prioritized seizing every opportunity that enhances value for our member institutions

and student-athletes," the league said. "Whether through private capital, naming rights, innovative partnerships or realignment, we have proactively assessed each opportunity, and are prepared to collaboratively take action-steps to be at the forefront of success and sustainability."

Last week, the Pac-12 announced that Boise State, Colorado State, Fresno State and San Diego State would be leaving the Mountain West to join Oregon State and Washington State in a reconstructed Conference of Champions, starting in 2026.

The Pac-12 needs to add at least two more schools to be an NCAA and College Football Playoff-recognized conference in 2026. With speculation that the Pac-12 could target schools in the American such as Memphis and Tulane, the AAC isn't standing still under new Commissioner Tim Pernetti.

The conference added Army as a football-only member this year to go along with

rival Navy, which is also a football-only member. Army-Navy remains a nonconference game, with its own separate television contract with CBS that runs through 2028.

Former American Commissioner Mike Aresco had long encouraged the conference to try to bring in both Army and Air Force, believing that having all three services academies playing for the Commander-in-Chief's Trophy could provide value to the league.

Air Force football has traditionally been the most consistent winner among the academies, with five double-digit victory seasons since 2014 and only three losing regular seasons since 2007.

The American has 14 football playing members in the Eastern and Central time zones. Air Force, located in Colorado Springs, would be the first member located in the Mountain time zone.

Manzardo, Guardians rally late to beat Twins

Associated Press

CLEVELAND—Rookie Kyle Manzardo hit a two-run, go-ahead homer in the eighth inning and Emmanuel Clase recorded his 46th save as the Cleveland Guardians rallied to a 4-3 victory over the Minnesota Twins on Monday night that tightened their grip on the AL Central.

With Josh Naylor on second after a double, Manzardo connected on the first pitch from Griffin Jax (4-5), sending it deep into the right-field seats for his third homer to trigger an eruption of joy in Cleveland's dugout and throughout Progressive Field.

"I'm so happy for him," said Guardians manager Stephen Vogt, who was overcome with emotion during his postgame news conference. "Everyone who grows up wanting to play baseball has dreamed of that moment happening. The smile on his face looking back at our dugout, that was incredible."

Vogt paused to compose himself.

"My favorite part is Naylor at second base standing there watching it and cheering, waiting for him at home plate with a smile on his face," Vogt said, his eyes reddened by tears.

"To see two teammates come together like that, that's powerful stuff."

Their MLB-leading 40th come-from-behind win moved the Guardians 7½ games ahead of the defending division champion Twins. It also reduced Cleveland's magic number for clinching a playoff berth to two.

Clase, who has built a strong argument for Cy Young consideration, worked the ninth for his 33rd consecutive save and No. 46 this season, tying him with José Mesa (1995) for the club's single-season record.

Pablo López pitched into the seventh inning for the Twins, but Minnesota's bullpen couldn't protect the lead.

The Twins' division chances

are essentially done, and every loss puts a possible wild-card spot in jeopardy. Minnesota held a 1½-game lead over Detroit for the final AL wild-card spot going into Tuesday.

Mets 2, Nationals 1 (10): Starling Marte lined a game-ending single in the 10th inning that lifted host New York to a critical win over Washington.

New York moved a game ahead of rival Atlanta for the final National League wild card when the Braves were blown out 9-0 at home by the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Playing again without Francisco Lindor, who will be sidelined for a few days due to a sore back, the Mets got just two runners beyond first base in the first seven innings. But then Jose Iglesias, replacing Lindor at shortstop and atop the lineup, hit an RBI infield single off the glove of reliever Derek Law with two outs in the eighth.

Dodgers 9, Braves 0: Freddie Freeman hit a three-run homer against his former team and visiting Los Angeles beat Atlanta, dropping them out of a playoff position.

Yoshinobu Yamamoto allowed four hits and two walks in four innings, throwing 72 pitches in his second start since returning from a right arm injury — up from 59 on Sept. 10. The Dodgers extended their scoreless streak to 15 innings and pitched their 13th shutout.

NL West-leading Los Angeles (89-61) maintained a 3½-game lead over second-place San Diego. The Dodgers scored nine runs on just four hits for the second time since 1906: The other was on June 4, 2021, also at Atlanta. After losing the first two games of the series by a combined 16-3, the Dodgers outscored the Braves 18-2 over the last two.

Cubs 9, Athletics 2: Shota Imanaga struck out a career-high 11 in winning his fifth straight start, Dansby Swanson homered while tying his season

high with four RBIs and host Chicago defeated Oakland.

Chicago remained five games behind the New York Mets for the final NL wild card with 12 games remaining.

Imanaga (14-3) allowed five hits over six innings, including Brent Rooker's 38th homer, a two run-drive in the third. The 31-year-old left-hander walked three.

Brewers 6, Phillies 2: Joey Ortiz and William Contreras each drove in two runs, and host Milwaukee moved a step closer to clinching the NL Central title by beating NL East-leading Philadelphia.

The Brewers' magic number is two as they seek their third division championship in the last four years. Milwaukee had a chance to wrap it up Tuesday night with a win and a Chicago Cubs loss.

Brewers starter Aaron Civale (9-8) scattered seven hits and struck out six while allowing one run and one walk in five innings. Colin Rea, normally a starter, made his fourth relief appearance of the season and worked 2⅓ shutout innings for the 34-year-old's first career save.

Tigers 7, Royals 6: Colt Keith hit a two-run homer, Matt Vierling had three hits while driving in the go-ahead run, and visiting Detroit rallied from an early four-run deficit to beat Kansas City.

Pinch-hitter Wenceel Pérez also drove in two runs for Detroit, which began its final road trip of the regular season by moving within 1½ games of Minnesota for the final AL wild-card spot.

Bobby Witt Jr. hit a grand slam to stake Kansas City to a 4-0 lead, and he added a bunt single for a five-RBI game. But the Royals otherwise kept squandering chances to score, just as they did in their loss to the Pirates on Sunday.

Rockies 3, Diamondbacks 2: Brenton Doyle scored the winning run on a ninth-inning

throwing error, and host Colorado dealt a blow to Arizona's playoff chances with a win in a game that marked the return of Rockies pitcher Antonio Senzuela from Tommy John surgery.

Ezequiel Tovar and Hunter Goodman homered for the Rockies, who beat the Diamondbacks for only the third time in 11 meetings this season.

Ketel Marte hit a two-run homer for the defending NL champion Diamondbacks (83-67), who are in the second NL wild card position, one game ahead of the New York Mets and two in front of Atlanta.

Padres 3, Astros 1: Yu Darvish (6-3) had his best outing since being sidelined for more than three months with six shutout innings, and rookie Jackson Merrill and Jurickson Profar homered as host San Diego beat AL West-leading Houston.

The Padres took a 2½-game lead over Arizona for the top NL wild card and stayed 3½ games behind the first-place Los Angeles Dodgers in the NL West.

White Sox 8, Angels 4: Andrew Benintendi homered twice for the third time this season and drove in four runs, and visiting Chicago beat Los Angeles for its first three-game winning streak in nearly three months.

It is only the fourth time the White Sox have won at least three in a row — and the first since June 27-29, when they beat Atlanta and Colorado. Chicago took two of three from Oakland over the weekend to snap a string of 20 consecutive series losses.

Cardinals 4, Pirates 0: Andre Pallante outdueled rookie Paul Skenes, striking out a career-high nine over seven innings to lead host St. Louis over Pittsburgh.

Pallante (7-8) allowed four hits and one walk. Andrew Kitredge and Ryan Fernandez each pitched a perfect inning, finishing a four-hitter and the ninth shutout for the Cardinals this season.