

US ready if Mideast conflict expands

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. has kept an increased military presence in the Middle East throughout much of the past year, with about 40,000 forces, at least a dozen warships and four Air Force fighter jet squadrons spread across the region both to protect allies and to serve as a deterrent against attacks, several U.S. officials said.

As attacks between Israel and Hezbollah sharply spiked in recent days, worries are growing that the conflict could escalate into an all-out war, even as Tel Aviv keeps up its nearly yearlong fight against Hamas militants in Gaza.

Hezbollah says Israel crossed a “red line” with explosive attacks on its communications devices and vowed to keep up the missile strikes it’s launched since fellow Iranian-backed militant group Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, setting off the war in Gaza.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant — who has spoken repeatedly in recent days to U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin — has declared the start of a “new phase” of the war, shifting its focus to the northern front against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

So far, the U.S. hasn’t signaled a troop increase or change as a result of the latest attacks, and there is already a beefed-up force in the region.

“We’re confident in the ability that we have there right now to protect our forces and should we need to come to the defense of Israel as well,” Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said Thursday.

A military official said the additional resources have helped as the U.S. patrols various conflict areas, including operations targeting Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, defending Israel and countering threats from Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in

Yemen, who have targeted commercial ships in the Red Sea and launched ballistic missiles at Israel.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to describe U.S. troop movements and locations.

Normally, about 34,000 U.S. forces are deployed to U.S. Central Command, which covers the entire Middle East. That troop level grew in the early months of the Israel-Hamas war to about 40,000 as additional ships and aircraft were sent in.

Several weeks ago, the total spiked to nearly 50,000 when Austin ordered two aircraft carriers and their accompanying warships to stay in the region as tensions roiled between Israel and Lebanon. One carrier strike group has since left and moved into the Indo-Pacific.

The beefed-up presence is designed both to help defend Israel and protect U.S. and allied

personnel and assets.

The U.S. is back to one aircraft carrier in the region. Austin has extended the deployment of carriers several times in the past year so that on a few occasions, there has been the rare presence of two at once.

American military commanders have long argued that the presence of a formidable aircraft carrier — with its array of fighter jets and surveillance aircraft and sophisticated missiles — is a strong deterrent against Iran.

The Air Force sent in an additional squadron of advanced F-22 fighter jets last month, bringing the total number of land-based fighter squadrons in the Middle East to four.

That force also includes a squadron of A-10 Thunderbolt II ground attack aircraft, F-15E Strike Eagles and F-16 fighter jets. The Air Force is not identifying what countries the planes are operating from.

Navy program aims to improve female uniforms

By ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy is kicking off a five-year, multiphase uniform improvement program intended to deliver “a modernized and consistent uniform fit and sizing system,” according to an updated policy memo.

The Size Modernization Program’s first phase focuses on female officer and chief petty officer uniforms, with an emphasis on service and dress slacks, skirts, shirts and blouses, according to the Wednesday memo signed by Vice Adm. Richard Cheeseman, deputy chief

of naval operations for personnel, manpower and training.

A short-sleeve summer white overblouse will be introduced this month through fit clinics in Pensacola, Fla.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Bangor, Wash.; and San Diego. The rest of the fleet will have access in October.

A long-sleeve dress overblouse to be worn with sailors’ service dress blue uniform and service slacks with back pockets will be available at some uniform centers in April and May, respectively.

Redesigned service skirts are also on the way, with availabil-

ity starting December 2025, according to the memo.

The new duds will feature an A-frame design, back-center zipper fastener and a kick pleat. The memo also announced new occasions for sailors to wear Recruiting Command, Recruit Division Commander, Career Counselor and Naval War College Alumni identification badges.

For the last category, alumni can wear badges on service dress and full-dress uniforms at formal and informal alumni events or other events that include U.S. or international

alumni.

The badge cannot be worn for dinner dress uniforms.

For the remaining three badges, sailors assigned to shore duties can wear metal badges on working uniforms until cloth badges are available.

Embroidered badges can be worn on the Navy Working Uniform Type 3 for shore and sea assignments.

The modernization program’s second phase will focus on the modernization of E-1 to E-6 uniform components, according to a MyNavy HR fact sheet released this month.

Soldier who deserted to N. Korea sentenced

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

FORT BLISS, Texas — Pvt. Travis King on Friday was sentenced to one year in prison after pleading guilty to deserting to North Korea. But he walked out of the courtroom a free man.

"With time already served and credit for good behavior, Travis is now free and will return home," said Frank Rosenblatt, an attorney for the soldier.

Military Judge Lt. Col. Rick Mathew also sentenced King to reduction in rank to E-1 and a dishonorable discharge in a court-martial that lasted most of the day.

During the trial, King, 24, sat in his dress uniform between his attorneys and said it was his decision on July 18, 2023, to join a tour of the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea and then bolt into North Korea. The soldier did so because he was "dissatisfied with work," he told

the judge.

King also pleaded guilty to three counts of disobeying an officer on Oct. 7, 2023, and another charge of assaulting a noncommissioned officer the following day. He pleaded not guilty to additional charges related to child sexual abuse material and making false statements. The judge dismissed the remaining charges.

During the October incident that led to charges, King said he violated an order from his commander in the 6th Squadron of the 1st Cavalry Regiment. He knew based on an earlier counseling session with the captain that he needed to sign out to leave the barracks, was not allowed to drink alcohol or leave Camp Hovey or Camp Casey where he was stationed in South Korea for any reason. He knowingly broke these rules and went to Seoul, where he bought liquor and then went to a nightclub where he drank so much tequila he vomited.

After getting into a fight in the nightclub, South Korean police arrested King and called the Army to collect him. On the roughly one-hour drive from Seoul back to Camp Hovey, King grabbed the arms of a sergeant who was driving the vehicle to try and escape.

"You'll never take me alive," Capt. Christopher Deisenroth, a prosecutor, said King shouted as he fought the four other soldiers in the vehicle.

King told the judge that he did all this because he "had no desire to return."

A mental health evaluation conducted on King prior to the court-martial diagnosed him with mental health conditions, but none so severe that he did not understand his actions in South Korea. The evaluation also concluded he was competent to stand trial. King agreed with this when asked by the judge.

Mathew deliberated for nearly an hour before deciding how to

sentence King based on the limited options available to him through the plea agreement.

The deal limited King's sentence to just one year in prison. The maximum available without that agreement was 20 years.

Leading up to his court-martial, King spent 338 days in Otero County Detention Center in nearby Alamogordo, N.M., which he told the court was akin to solitary confinement. Combined with his good behavior, King walked out of the courtroom free.

During sentencing, King's attorneys painted him as a sympathetic figure who has already endured punishment in life, beginning from his early childhood in government housing where he saw criminal activity and his move later into a group home for teens. King, a Black man, then faced racism in the Army, the public scrutiny of his actions and expects future unsolicited comments from others.

Navy CNO: Treatment for breast cancer successful

By CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the Navy's top admiral, is cancer free after recently undergoing several weeks of breast cancer treatment, her office announced Friday.

Franchetti, the chief of naval operations, was diagnosed with Stage 1 breast cancer in June during a routine mammogram, according to Cmdr. Desiree Frame, spokeswoman for the admiral.

Franchetti underwent outpatient surgery in July, which Frame said was successful. During the surgery, her authority was temporarily transported to Adm. James Kilby, the vice chief of naval operations.

Franchetti has since completed radiation therapy. In September, she began maintenance endocrine therapy, which is used to prevent or delay relapse.

"I am grateful for my wonderful team of doctors at John P. Murtha Cancer Center for their excellent care and their development of a treatment plan that allows me to continue leading the world's greatest Navy," Franchetti said in a prepared statement. "I am blessed that this was detected early and will forever be an advocate for early and routine screening."

Franchetti is serving as the Navy's 33rd chief of naval operations, a position she has held since Nov. 2, 2023. She is the first woman to serve in the role.

Lawmaker criticizes Navy secretary on sub funding

By CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro was met with pushback and accusations of withholding information by lawmakers Thursday when he urged them to fill a \$1.95 billion gap needed to fund the building of two new submarines.

"I am accountable to the taxpayers, and Mr. Secretary, you are accountable to me," Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Calif., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee's defense subpanel, told Del Toro during a closed hearing, according to prepared remarks shared on the subpanel's website.

The House subpanel and Del Toro held a closed meeting to discuss the budgeting shortfall for

two Virginia-class submarines. Lawmakers were notified of the funding gap two weeks ago when the White House issued a list of items needing congressional support if the government is funded by a continuing resolution into fiscal year 2025, which begins Oct. 1.

Without support from Congress, construction cannot begin during a continuing resolution, according to the White House.

Calvert accused the Navy of keeping lawmakers in the dark about the submarine funding shortfalls and offering inconsistent information about delays. Beyond the \$1.95 billion needed for the two submarines, there is a projected \$17 billion funding shortfall across the Virginia-class program for the next six years.

6th fleet leader Ishee bids farewell, warns of conflict

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The increasing risk of widespread war in the Middle East and continued Russian aggression in Europe are some of the biggest challenges facing the Navy in the region, one of the service's top officers said as he bid farewell to command of the U.S. 6th Fleet.

Recent exploding pager and walkie-talkie attacks on Hezbollah militants in Lebanon that killed dozens and injured thousands, and the terrorist group's promise of retaliation against Israel have created the very real potential for serious miscalculation, Vice Adm. Thomas Ishee said Friday.

"This could very easily become a case where there's an escalation and then Israel decides to escalate back, and now we're on the way to a broader war," Ishee said. "That's my fear."

Ishee said he believes that neither Hezbollah nor Israel wants to see a larger conflict, "but they also both have their own objectives that keep them

shooting at each other, and there could easily be a mistake like the missile from Hezbollah that hit the soccer field" in July, killing 12 Israeli children.

The potential for error also exists in Europe, where Russia is "scratching on the edges, in the gray zone" of provoking wider war, said Ishee, noting that mistakes have previously caused wars on the Continent.

A strong U.S. commitment to NATO along with continued demonstration of the alliance's capabilities and unity are needed to keep Moscow in check, he said.

"Hopefully, Russia will see that and think today is not a great day to attack NATO," said Ishee, adding that he doesn't think the Kremlin wants a wider war.

Ishee made the remarks after relinquishing command of 6th Fleet, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO and Joint Force Maritime Component Commander Europe to Vice Adm. Jeffrey Anderson in a ceremony aboard the amphibious command ship USS Mount Whitney in Naples.

Adm. Stuart Munsch, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command, Naples, presided over the handover that made Anderson the 50th commander of 6th Fleet.

A 1991 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, Anderson has served in numerous squadrons flying F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jets and has deployed in support of operations Deliberate Forge, Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom, Iraqi Freedom and Inherent Resolve, according to his Navy biography.

Those deployments have found the Fayetteville, Ga., native embarked on the aircraft carriers USS Enterprise, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, USS Theodore Roosevelt and USS Harry S. Truman.

More recently, Anderson has served as the Navy's deputy director for political and military affairs in Asia, as commander of Carrier Strike Group 3 embarked on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and as director for operations of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, according to the Navy.

USS Truman to deploy to the Mideast this week

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman and a force of 6,500 sailors will deploy this week on a mission that is expected to take the warship's strike group into the Middle East, Navy officials announced Friday.

The Truman and the other ships in its strike group will leave early this week from Naval Station Norfolk, Va., and Naval Station Mayport, Fla., according to U.S. Fleet Forces. The carrier strike group includes Carrier Air Wing 1 with nine aviation squadrons, the Ticonderoga-class, guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg, and two Arleigh Burke-class, guided-missile destroyers, the USS Stout and the USS Jason Dunham.

The strike group has spent recent months training in the western Atlantic Ocean for a rare, pre-planned deployment expected to take the ship into the hostile environment of the Red Sea.

U.S. sailors and allied nations have fought almost daily for months to down drones and missiles launched by Iran-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen as tensions in the Middle East have raged on for nearly a year.

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford in October 2023 was ordered to sail to the region after a deadly attack on Israel by Hamas militants. Following the attack, Iran and proxy forces have targeted maritime merchants and shipping traffic in the Red Sea.

In the past year, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has twice ordered two carriers to the region, as well as bolstering U.S. forces with an amphibious ready group and a nuclear-powered submarine.

Marine enlisted leader jailed this month also faces domestic violence accusation

By SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

The wife of a senior enlisted Marine who was arrested last week filed a domestic violence case against him in a San Diego County court earlier in the week.

The Superior Court of California record shows a domestic violence prevention order against Sgt. Maj. Gerardo Trevino was filed Tuesday, six days after he was arrested by Naval

Criminal Investigative Service agents.

The Navy confirmed the arrest Monday but did not disclose the reason why Trevino, 38, was jailed after being fired from his post as the top senior enlisted leader of 3rd Recruit Training Battalion at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego.

NCIS officials on Friday declined to comment on the domestic violence case.

NCIS is pursuing an ongoing investigation.

In the order filed Tuesday, Trevino's wife alleges that he had been controlling and abusive for months, hitting, punching, and, in one incident last month, strangling her until she "passed out," according to KPBS, San Diego's public television station and website.

Trevino's wife provided NCIS with photos of her injuries, according to the court filing.

Biden: Reeling China is testing region

Associated Press

CLAYMONT, Del. — President Joe Biden told Indo-Pacific allies on Saturday that he believes China's increasing military assertiveness is an effort to test the region at a turbulent moment for Beijing.

Biden's comments were caught by a hot mic after he and fellow leaders of the so-called Quad delivered opening remarks before the press at a summit he's hosting near his hometown of Wilmington, Del. He said his administration sees Beijing's actions as a "change in tactic, not a change in strategy."

China is struggling to pull up its economy that was pummeled by the coronavirus pandemic and has seen an extended slowdown in industrial activity and

real estate prices as Beijing faces pressure to ramp up spending to stimulate demand.

"China continues to behave aggressively, testing us all across the region, and it's true in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, South China, South Asia and the Taiwan Straits," Biden told Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. He added, "At least from our perspective, we believe (Chinese President) Xi Jinping is looking to focus on domestic economic challenges and minimize the turbulence in China's diplomatic relationships, and he's also looking to buy himself some diplomatic space, in my view, to aggressively pursue China's interest."

sively pursue China's interest."

Starting with a trade war that dates back to 2018, China and the United States have grown at odds over a range of issues, from global security, such as China's claims over the South China Sea, to industrial policy on electric vehicle and solar panel manufacturing.

The administration has repeatedly spoken out about concerns about Chinese aggression toward Taiwan and more recently on the frequent clashes between Chinese and Philippine vessels in disputed areas of the South China Sea. At the summit, the leaders agreed to expand the partnership among the Quad nations' coast guards to improve interoperability and capabilities, with Indian, Japa-

nese and Australian personnel sailing on U.S. ships in the region. U.S. officials would not say if those transits would include the South China Sea.

China also has longtime territorial disputes involving other claimants including Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei. U.S. officials worry about China's long-stated goals of unifying Taiwan with China's mainland and the possibility of war over Taiwan. The self-ruled island democracy is claimed by Beijing as part of its territory.

The leaders in a joint declaration issued following their talks expressed "serious concern about the militarization ... and coercive and intimidating maneuvers in the South China Sea."

Mass shooting kills four, wounds 18 in Alabama

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Four people were killed and 18 wounded in a mass shooting at a popular nightlife area in Birmingham, Ala., with many of the victims caught in the crossfire, police said early Sunday.

Authorities asked the public for tips as they searched for the shooters.

The shooting happened shortly after 11 p.m. Saturday in Five Points South, a district filled

with entertainment venues, restaurants and bars that is often crowded on weekend nights.

Multiple suspects pulled up in a vehicle, got out, fired shots, got back in the vehicle and fled, Police Chief Scott Thurmond said at a news conference Sunday morning. He described the shooting as possibly "a hit" conducted in exchange for payment.

Officers found two men and a woman on a sidewalk with gun-

shot wounds, and they were pronounced dead there. An additional male gunshot victim was pronounced dead at a hospital, police said.

Authorities believe the intended target was among the dead, Thurmond said at the news conference, where he was joined by Mayor Randall Woodfin and officials from the FBI and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Investigators believe other victims were caught in the crossfire.

By early Sunday, after victims began showing up at hospitals, police had identified 18 people with injuries, some of them life-threatening, Officer Truman Fitzgerald said in an email.

There were no immediate arrests. Anyone with information was asked to contact authorities.

Hezbollah strikes back at Israel with over 100 rockets

Associated Press

NAHARIYA, Israel — Hezbollah launched more than 100 rockets early Sunday across a wider and deeper area of northern Israel, with some landing near the city of Haifa, as Israel launched hundreds of strikes on Lebanon. A Hezbollah leader declared an "open-ended battle" was underway as both sides appeared to be spiraling toward

all-out war.

The rocket barrage overnight was in response to Israeli attacks in Lebanon that have killed dozens, including a veteran Hezbollah commander, and an unprecedented attack targeting the group's communications devices. Air raid sirens echoed across northern Israel, sending thousands of people scrambling into shelters.

One rocket struck near a residential building in Kiryat Bialik, a city near Haifa, wounding at least three people and setting buildings and cars on fire. Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service said that a total of four people were wounded.

Avi Vazana raced to a shelter with his wife and 9-month-old baby before he heard the boom of the rocket hitting in Kiryat

Bialik. Then he went back outside to see if anyone was hurt.

"I ran without shoes, without a shirt, only with pants. I ran to this house when everything was still on fire to try to find if there are other people," he said.

Lebanon's Health Ministry said that three people were killed and another four wounded in Israeli strikes near the border.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Yacht loaded with ammo, fireworks burns near LA

CA LOS ANGELES — Marina del Rey's harbor produced an unexpected light show as a luxury yacht loaded with ammunition and fireworks burned for more than two hours before flames were extinguished, authorities said.

Flames leaped 20 to 30 feet from the 100-foot vessel, dubbed the Admiral, while live ammunition rounds could be heard firing from the boat, according to videos from the scene last week.

Los Angeles County Fire Department officials said two passengers aboard the boat exited without injuries. The yacht's owner, who was not identified, told fire officials that the vessel was carrying 1,000 rounds of ammunition and fireworks.

Smokies peak reverting to Cherokee name

TN GATLINBURG — The highest peak at Great Smoky Mountains National Park is officially reverting to its Cherokee name more than 150 years after a surveyor named it for a Confederate general.

The U.S. Board of Geographic Names voted on Wednesday in favor of a request from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to officially change the name Clingmans Dome to Kuwohi, according to a news release from the park. The Cherokee name for the mountain translates to "mulberry place."

Kuwohi is a sacred place for the Cherokee people and is the highest point within the tradi-

tional Cherokee homeland, according to the park. The peak is visible from the Qualla Boundary, home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

Sheriff charged in killing of judge at courthouse

KY FRANKFORT — A judge in a rural Kentucky county was fatally shot in his courthouse chambers Thursday, and the local sheriff was charged with murder in the killing, police said.

The preliminary investigation indicates Letcher County Sheriff Shawn M. Stines shot District Judge Kevin Mullins multiple times following an argument inside the courthouse, according to Kentucky State Police. Mullins, who held the judgeship for 15 years, died at the scene, and Stines surrendered without incident.

The fatal shooting in Whitesburg sent shock waves through the tight-knit Appalachian town and county seat with about 1,700 residents. Mullins, 54, was hit multiple times in the shooting, Kentucky State Police said. Stines, 43, was charged with one count of first-degree murder.

Couple at nudist ranch died of blows to heads

CA REDLANDS — A Southern California couple whose bodies were found under their neighbor's home in a nudist ranch died from "blunt force trauma to the head," an autopsy found.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department released the cause of death of Daniel Menard, 79, and his wife Stephanie, 73, on Tuesday, the Los Angeles Times reported.

The couple and their dog

were last seen on Aug. 24 and reported missing to the Redlands Police Department by a worried friend. Five days after they went missing, searchers found their remains in bags in a concrete bunker underneath the home of their neighbor Michael Royce Sparks. Sparks, 62, was arrested on homicide charges and pleaded not guilty during his arraignment Sept. 9.

Authorities have not revealed a motive in the killings.

Woman burned hiking off trail near Old Faithful

WY YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK — A New Hampshire woman suffered burns on her leg after hiking off trail in Yellowstone National Park and falling into scalding water in a thermal area near the Old Faithful geyser, park officials said.

The 60-year-old woman from Windsor, N.H., along with her husband and their dog were walking off a designated trail near the Mallard Lake Trailhead when she broke through a thin crust over the water and suffered second- and third-degree burns to her lower leg, park officials said. Her husband and the dog were not injured.

The woman was flown to Idaho Falls, Idaho, for treatment.

Pro-Palestinian protester wearing keffiyeh charged

NY EAST MEADOW — A pro-Palestinian protester wearing a keffiyeh scarf has been charged with violating a county's new law banning face masks in public, reviving fears from opponents that the statute is being used to diminish free speech rights.

Police said the 26-year-old

North Bellmore resident was arrested during a protest in front of Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst, an orthodox synagogue near the New York City borough of Queens.

Police on the scene asked him if he was wearing the garment for medical or religious purposes, which are the two major exceptions to the new ban, said Nassau County Police Department spokesperson Scott Skrynecki. When the man confirmed he was wearing it in solidarity with Palestinians and not for either of those reasons, he was placed under arrest. He was eventually released with a notice to appear in court on Oct. 2.

Brackish water may threaten drinking supply

LA BATON ROUGE — An influx of salt water in the Mississippi River, which feeds southeastern Louisiana's drinking water supplies, is once again creeping up the waterway. For the third year in a row, an underwater levee is being built to slow the brackish intrusion and prevent it from reaching water intake treatment facilities.

Salt water in southeast Louisiana has become a regular occurrence in recent years, as the flow of the Mississippi River has ebbed under dry conditions. Communities rely on the Mississippi's volume and current to push salt water from the Gulf of Mexico back out to sea.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness say they are closely monitoring the influx of salt water.

— From wire reports

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No. 18 Michigan scores late, tops USC

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Michigan welcomed Southern California to the Big Ten with a heavy dose of smashmouth football.

Kalel Mullings surged 2 yards for a touchdown on fourth-and-goal with 37 seconds left, lifting the 18th-ranked Wolverines to a 27-24 win over the 11th-ranked Trojans in their conference debut.

Michigan (3-1, 1-0) overcame losing a 14-0 lead in the first half and coughing up two fumbles in the second half to extend its Big Ten winning streak to a school-record 26 games.

The Wolverines won with a 10-play, 89-yard TD drive as Mullings did most of the work.

The former linebacker converted a third down from the Michigan 20 with a 63-yard run and capped the possession with his second touchdown behind a fullback in a jumbo package that left little doubt where the ball was going.

"It's not five guys, it's seven with the tight ends out there," Mullings said.

Michigan and USC had played 10 times previously, eight in the Rose Bowl and not in the regular season since 1958.

The Trojans (2-1, 0-1) went ahead 24-20 midway through the fourth when Miller Moss threw his third touchdown pass, a 24-

yarder to Ja'Kobi Lane.

USC's last chance ended with a fourth-down throw that came up short of the stick near midfield.

"I think it was just a classic, back-and-forth fight," Trojans coach Lincoln Riley said.

Mullings had a career-high 159 yards rushing, including a 53-yard scoring run to put the Wolverines ahead early, and Donovan Edwards had a 41-yard run to give them a two-touchdown lead.

Moss was 28-for-51 for 283 yards with a season-high three touchdowns and an interception that was returned for Michigan's only other second-half score.

"I feel like I cost our team in a big way," he said.

USC's Woody Marks ran for 100 yards on 13 carries, and ripped the football out of Kenneth Grant's hand after the big defensive tackle had recovered a fumble for Michigan.

Moss bounced back from throwing a pick-6 to Will Johnson that gave the defending national champions a double-digit lead in the third quarter with a 16-yard touchdown pass to Jay Fair later in the period.

His third touchdown pass to Lane with 7:01 left in the fourth came after Marks' steal deep in Michigan territory.

Michigan needed a touchdown, trailing by

four, in the final minute because USC defensive tackle Gavin Meyer blocked the extra point after Johnson's interception return for a touchdown.

It also needed the clutch score because Edwards fumbled to set up a Trojans touchdown — and Michigan didn't have a passing threat.

Alex Orji made his first start at quarterback and was 7-for-12 for 32 yards and ran 13 times for 43 yards.

The takeaway

USC's revamped defense under new coordinator D'Anton Lynn was in control on most plays, but gave up three long runs and failed to make a stop on the goal-line stand.

"We came up one play short," Riley said.

Moore earned his first signature win as Jim Harbaugh's successor, making enough moves that panned out in what was potentially a pivotal game in his first season.

"Our players never flinched and that's what you're really proud of," he said.

Poll implications

Michigan may move up for the first time this season in the AP Top 25 and will extend a streak to 51 straight weeks of being ranked since early in the 2021 season. USC might slip a little in the poll.

Tennessee wins in Heupel's return to Oklahoma

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — Tennessee coach Josh Heupel won in his return to Oklahoma — the same school he quarterbacked to a national championship in 2000 and fired him as offensive coordinator after the 2014 season — as Nico Iamaleava passed for 194 yards to help the sixth-ranked Volunteers defeat the Sooners 25-15 on Saturday night.

Iamaleava took the game ball to Heupel shortly after the game ended.

"I know it meant a lot to him," Iamaleava said. "He didn't show it as much during the week, but we know what it meant to him and what it meant to us."

Heupel downplayed the circumstances, instead focusing on his team's success.

"This game was never about me coming back here, not for this football team," he said. "And I say all that — they also understood that this one was a little bit different for me personally, too, but that's not what it was about. But I do appreciate their recognition

of that and wanting that for me."

Oklahoma coach Brent Venables was the defensive coordinator on the team Heupel led to the national title. He said it was a tough loss.

"I'm disappointed in our team tonight," Venables said. "It's not one of those moments where you're happy for him (Heupel) because you're not. But that just kind of comes with the territory."

Dylan Sampson ran for 92 yards and a touchdown, Dont'e Thornton Jr. had a 66-yard touchdown reception and Bru McCoy had four catches for 92 yards for the Volunteers.

Tennessee (4-0, 1-0 Southeastern Conference) held No. 15 Oklahoma to 222 yards in the Sooners' first-ever SEC game.

It wasn't the up-tempo style one might expect from a Heupel-coached team. Tennessee had the ball for nearly 36 minutes and rode its defense.

"Your team forms its own identity each

year, and it's my responsibility to put them in a position to play a complete game together and find the best way to win," he said. "And tonight, that's how the game unfolded."

Jovantae Barnes ran for a score and caught a touchdown pass for Oklahoma (3-1, 0-1). Michael Hawkins Jr. passed for 132 yards in relief of starter Jackson Arnold for the Sooners, who was benched late in the second quarter after completing 7 of 16 passes for 54 yards and an interception.

Venables said Hawkins and Arnold will compete for the starting job heading into Saturday's game at Auburn. He said Hawkins, a freshman, handled the situation well.

"Mike is — he's confident," Venables said. "He's loose in the right way. The moment's not going to overwhelm him, even though he's a young guy."

Oklahoma defensive back Kendel Dolby was carted off in the second quarter after a gruesome injury to his lower right leg. Venables said it was a dislocated ankle.

Larson wins, 2 former champs ousted

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Just minutes after Kyle Larson crossed the finish line on the most dominating victory ever for a Hendrick Motorsports driver, his team rushed his 9-year-old son to the winning Chevrolet.

Owen Larson was placed on the window, half in the car, half out, as his dad drove a victory lap around Bristol Motor Speedway with his son holding the No. 1 finger in the air. He later joined his dad atop the car during Saturday night's victory lane celebration.

"We had a little boys' weekend here this weekend," Larson said. "We'll bring some hardware home tonight, too."

Larson dominated the first elimination race of NASCAR's 10-race playoff portion of the season by leading all but 38 of the 500 laps at the track in Bristol, Tenn. — the most laps led ever in a race by a Hendrick driver. It easily moved him into the second round of the playoffs, while former NASCAR cham-

pions Brad Keselowski and Martin Truex Jr., as well as Ty Gibbs and Harrison Burton, were eliminated from the 16-driver field.

"I've had a lot of good cars since I've come to Hendrick Motorsports, but man, that was just great execution all weekend by the team," Larson said. "We dominate a lot of races but we might not close them all out, so it feels really good to close one out here."

The first of three elimination races in the 10-race playoffs began with Denny Hamlin, Truex, Keselowski and Burton all below the cutline and facing elimination from the 16-driver field.

Hamlin, a three-time Daytona 500 winner with four career wins at Bristol, was never really worried and finished fourth.

"My aspiration was winning," Hamlin said. "It's as good as what we've been here the last couple times. It's all offense from this point forward."

Burton, who used a surprise win at Daytona last month to

qualify for the playoffs in the final few weeks before he loses his seat with Wood Brothers Racing, was doubtful to recover enough to advance and finished 35th. Keselowski, the 2012 Cup champion, and 2017 champion Truex had a better shot at salvaging their playoffs but both came up empty.

Truex was penalized for speeding on pit road, taking him out of contention to advance, and Keselowski just didn't have the pace. Joe Gibbs Racing had two of its four cars eliminated from the playoffs as Ty Gibbs was also penalized for speeding.

"That was just unfortunate there," said Gibbs, who finished 15th. "Speeding penalty is on me. It's my fault."

Keselowski finished 26th and lamented the lack of speed in his RFK Racing Ford.

"Didn't have the pace we wanted. We ran as hard as we could, there just wasn't anything there," Keselowski said. "Just gotta be faster."

Truex is retiring from full-

time racing at the end of the season.

"That kind of screws up your whole season," Truex said of the speeding penalty. "It's on me. It was my mistake. Just really sad for my guys. We had a really good car. I hate I screwed it up, would have at least tried to see what we could do."

Larson, meanwhile, led 462 of 500 laps, the most since Cale Yarborough led 495 laps in 1977. It was the fifth win of the season for the driver of the No. 5 Chevrolet.

It's an impressive stat considering the Hendrick team has fielded cars for Hall of Famers Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson, Terry Labonte and Dale Earnhardt Jr., among others.

"That's pretty awesome because there's been some legendary Hall of Famers race for Hendrick Motorsports, and we've all grown up watching Jeff Gordon and Jimmie Johnson dominate," Larson said. "So pretty cool to get my name on another record at Hendrick Motorsports."

Horvath accounts for 6 TDs, lifts Mids over Memphis

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Blake Horvath complemented two touchdown passes with 211 yards rushing and four scores and Rayuan Lane III had an 86-yard pick-6 in the closing seconds to help unbeaten Navy hold on for a 56-44 victory over Memphis, handing the Tigers their first loss in their American Athletic Conference opener on Saturday.

Memphis (3-1, 0-1) took the opening kickoff and marched 65 yards in nine plays with Mario Anderson Jr. scoring on a 7-yard run for a 7-0 lead. Horvath capped a 10-play, 77-yard drive with a 5-yard touchdown run to pull Navy (3-0, 2-0) even. Brandon Thomas raced 57 yards for a score with 1:21 left to give the Ti-

gers a 14-7 lead after one quarter.

Horvath connected with Eli Heidenreich for a 39-yard touchdown six seconds into the second quarter and Brandon Chatman added a 12-yard touchdown run on the next possession to give the Midshipmen a 21-14 lead. Caden Costa's 29-yard field goal cut the Tigers' deficit to four, but Horvath scored on a 3-yard run with 11 second left to put Navy up 28-17 at halftime.

Horvath teamed up with Chatman for a 37-yard score on Navy's first possession of the second half. Memphis answered with Seth Henigan's 37-yard touchdown pass to Roc Taylor the first time the Tigers had the ball. Anderson scored on a 5-yard run with 1:11 remaining,

but the Tigers' two-point conversion failed and left them trailing 35-30.

Horvath scored on a 7-yard run four seconds into the final quarter and broke free for a 90-yard touchdown on a first-down run to put the Midshipmen up 49-30 with 8:22 left to play.

Horvath completed 9 of 12 passes for 192 yards and did his damage on the ground with just 12 carries.

Henigan totaled 371 yards on 32-for-54 passing, adding a 36-yard touchdown pass to Marcello Bussey in the fourth quarter. Koby Drake had nine catches for 102 yards and Taylor hauled in six passes for 100. Thomas rushed for 125 on 12 carries and Anderson finished with 117 yards on 17 carries.

Army 37, Rice 14: Bryson Daily ran for three touchdowns and passed for two more to lead the host Black Knights beat the Owls.

Daily had already run for two scores and passed for two by halftime, accounting for 207 of Army's 272 yards of offense in the opening half. The Black Knights (3-0, 2-0 American) came in as the nation's rushing leaders at 390 yards per game and finished with 288 against Rice.

Daily dove over the line on fourth down for a 2-yard score and a 21-0 lead to cap a drive that began with a blocked field goal. Andon Thomas' interception at the 50 led to Daily's 17-yard scoring pass to Casey Reynolds for a 28-0 halftime lead.

Tigers inch closer in AL wild-card race

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Beau Brieske pitched out of a jam in the ninth inning, Riley Greene drove in the go-ahead run in the 10th and the Detroit Tigers inched closer in the AL wild-card chase by beating the Baltimore Orioles 6-4 on Saturday.

Detroit moved within a half-game of the Twins for the final American League playoff spot. Minnesota's game at Boston was rained out and rescheduled as part of a doubleheader Sunday.

The surging Tigers have won 10 of 13 to put themselves in surprise postseason contention after being under .500 a month ago.

"We've been battling for a long time now," said shortstop Trey Sweeney, who made an acrobatic, game-saving catch in shallow left field in the ninth, tumbling over Greene and getting the wind knocked out of him. "I think everybody's just confident in our lineup, in our staff and defense. Everybody's confident in each other, and that's what makes a good team."

This one almost slipped away when closer Jason Foley allowed consecutive singles, a walk and a double to Gunnar Henderson that tied the score at 4 in the ninth. Detroit manager A.J. Hinch pulled Foley for Brieske (3-4), who induced a groundout, got big help from Sweeney and then ended the threat with a flyout to center.

"There wasn't really a fear of blowing it because I couldn't go in there with that mindset," Brieske said. "There was just a tunnel directly to the plate. I didn't care. Honestly, I just didn't care about the negative outcome."

That clutch performance, followed by singles from Greene and Jace Jung and a sacrifice fly from Zach McKinstry off reliever Yennier Cano (4-3), quieted the Camden Yards crowd of nearly 40,000 that was ready to celebrate minutes earlier. Brieske got out of another jam in the 10th to seal it.

"It felt like the stakes were high and two teams really fighting to get into the postseason," Orioles manager Brandon Hyde said. "A lot of benches emptied and a lot of bullpen guys used. It was a heck of a game. Unfortunately, we just didn't finish it."

Mets 6, Phillies 3: Sean Manaea won his fourth straight decision, Brandon Nimmo hit a tiebreaking single in a three-run seventh inning and visiting New York prevented Philadelphia from clinching the NL East title.

Francisco Alvarez and Luisangel Acuña hit second-inning home runs that put the

Mets ahead 2-1. Alvarez added a two-run double in the seventh against Orion Kerker (5-3) for a 5-2 lead, and Edwin Díaz got a four-out save.

New York (86-69) won for the 17th time in 22 games. The Mets began the day two games ahead of Atlanta for the final NL wild card and one game behind Arizona, which was in the second wild-card position.

Braves 6, Marlins 2: Matt Olson broke a seventh-inning tie with a two-run homer and visiting Atlanta beat Miami to stay two games behind the Mets for the last National League wild card.

Gio Urshela and Jorge Soler also went deep for the Braves. Marcell Ozuna and Michael Harris II each had three hits.

Atlanta starter Max Fried allowed two runs — one earned — and five hits in six innings.

Yankees 10, Athletics 0: Aaron Judge hit his major league-leading 54th home run of the season, Giancarlo Stanton hit a three-run drive, and Anthony Volpe also went deep as visiting New York powered past Oakland.

The A's drew 33,198 fans on a night they planned a postgame drone and fireworks show during the club's final homestand before a planned move to Sacramento for the next three seasons before hoping to head to Las Vegas in 2028. Oakland has dropped four straight games at the Coliseum with four remaining at home.

Reds 7, Pirates 1: Elly De La Cruz hit a three-run homer, drove in four runs and scored twice to lead host Cincinnati over Pittsburgh.

De La Cruz, who had three hits, joined Eric Davis and Barry Larkin as the only Reds players with 25 homers and 65 stolen bases in a season. He stole his 100th career base in his 251st game on Friday night.

Nationals 5, Cubs 1: MacKenzie Gore struck out nine in seven sparkling innings, and visiting Washington beat Chicago.

Joey Gallo hit a three-run homer for Washington, which had dropped five in a row.

Washington played without All-Star shortstop CJ Abrams, who was demoted to the minors earlier in the day. Abrams isn't expected to play for the big league team again this season.

Rockies 6, Dodgers 3: Ryan McMahon hit a tiebreaking homer in the fifth inning and last-place Colorado regrouped after blowing a three-run lead to beat NL West-leading host Los Angeles.

The loss by the 92-win Dodgers assured that for the first time since 2014 no team in the major leagues will win 100 games, not including the 60-game, pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

Giants 9, Royals 0: LaMonte Wade Jr. and Matt Chapman hit two home runs each and visiting San Francisco handed Kansas City its sixth straight loss.

The Royals are clinging to the AL's second wild card berth. Kansas City's lead over the Minnesota Twins — who were rained out Saturday — was reduced to a half game. The Tigers are another half game behind the Twins.

Mariners 8, Rangers 4: Julio Rodríguez homered on the first pitch and had a tie-breaking RBI single in the sixth inning of his four-hit game, and wild card-chasing Seattle beat host Texas.

The Mariners (80-75) pulled within 1½ games of Minnesota for the third AL wild card after the Twins were rained out in Boston. Detroit is a half-game behind Minnesota.

Astros 10, Angels 4: Yordan Alvarez and Kyle Tucker hit back-to-back home runs and finished with four hits apiece in host Houston's win over Los Angeles.

Victor Caratini launched an early three-run homer to help back Astros starter Ronel Blanco (12-6). Houston had a season-high 20 hits and lowered its magic number to three for clinching the AL West crown.

Diamondbacks 5, Brewers 0: Joc Pederson, Jose Herrera and Ketel Marte homered, and visiting Arizona beat Milwaukee to maintain its position in the NL wild card standings.

Diamondbacks right-hander Merrill Kelly (5-0) struck out six while pitching five innings of two-hit ball.

Arizona (87-68) earned its fourth consecutive win. It stayed one game ahead of the New York Mets for the second NL wild card.

Cardinals 6, Guardians 5: Iván Herrera and Jordan Walker hit home runs and host St. Louis won after Cleveland had already clinched the AL Central title earlier in the day.

José Ramírez and Bo Naylor homered for Cleveland, which clinched its 12th division title since 1995 when San Francisco beat Kansas City earlier Saturday.

Padres 6, White Sox 2: Chicago tied the American League record with its 119th loss, when Xander Bogaerts and Elias Díaz each hit a two-run homer to help host San Diego win and move closer to a playoff spot.