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Saying goodbye

Tokyo Games close much the way they opened **Page 21**

United States athletes pose during the closing ceremony in the Olympic Stadium at the 2020 Summer Games on Sunday in Tokyo.
DAN MULLEN/AP

Army reviewing accusation commander made racial insults

Officer denied charges in sworn statement to investigators; initial complaint found to be unsubstantiated but now under high-level review

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The U.S. Army in Europe confirmed that it is investigating allegations by a battalion executive officer, who says a lieutenant colonel based in Grafenwoehr made racial insults about Black people under her command.

“The U.S. Army prioritizes respect and

professionalism, and has zero tolerance for unlawful discrimination,” Lt. Col. Michael Weisman, spokesman for 7th Army Training Command, said in a statement. “Any allegations of this nature are taken seriously, and these allegations are under investigation.”

At issue is an Equal Opportunity complaint by Maj. Tiffany Mohammed, who

said that while she was serving as the executive officer of the 589th Brigade Support Battalion she was called a “stupid little Black girl” by her boss during an April 16 meeting.

Mohammed also said that during an October farewell dinner for a soldier in the unit, she and another soldier overheard the commander ask, “Why are Black people always

late?” while awaiting the arrival of an African American service member.

Mohammed is of Indian descent, but said her dark skin has caused her to be mistaken for African American.

The EO complaint was found to be unsubstantiated in May by an Army investigating

SEE REVIEW ON PAGE 3

BUSINESS/WEATHER

United Airlines requires vaccine for US workers

Associated Press

United Airlines will require employees in the United States to be vaccinated against COVID-19 by Oct. 25, perhaps sooner, joining a rising number of big corporations that are responding to a surge in virus cases.

United was the first major U.S. airline to announce such a move. A smaller carrier, Frontier Airlines, said later Friday that it will require employees to be fully vaccinated by Oct. 1 or face "regular" testing for the virus.

Other airlines have offered extra pay or time off to employees who get vaccinated, but have not required them to get the shots.

United officials called their decision a matter of safety and cited "incredibly compelling" evidence of the effectiveness of the vaccines.

"We know some of you will disagree with this decision to require the vaccine for all United employees," CEO Scott Kirby and President Brett Hart told

employees Friday. But, they added, "the facts are crystal clear: everyone is safer when everyone is vaccinated."

United, which has 67,000 employees in the U.S., has required new hires to be vaccinated since mid-June. Unvaccinated workers are required to wear face masks at company offices.

The Chicago-based airline estimates that up to 90% of its pilots and close to 80% of its flight attendants are already vaccinated. They get incentives to do so.

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates	
Euro costs (Aug. 9)	\$1.15
Dollar buys (Aug. 9)	0.8258
British pound (Aug. 9)	\$1.36
Japanese yen (Aug. 9)	107.00
South Korean won (Aug. 9)	1,113.00

South Korea (Won)	1,146.79
Switzerland (Franc)	0.9151
Thailand (Baht)	33.44
Turkey (New Lira)	8.6316

(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For nonlocal currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

Commercial rates	
Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
Britain (Pound)	1.3874
Canada (Dollar)	1.2558
China (Yuan)	6.4836
Denmark (Krone)	6.3252
Egypt (Pound)	15.7052
Euro	0.8505
Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7808
Hungary (Forint)	301.02
Israel (Shekel)	3.2258
Japan (Yen)	110.23
Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3008
Norway (Krone)	8.8851
Philippines (Peso)	50.69
Poland (Zloty)	3.89
Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7504
Singapore (Dollar)	1.3551

INTEREST RATES

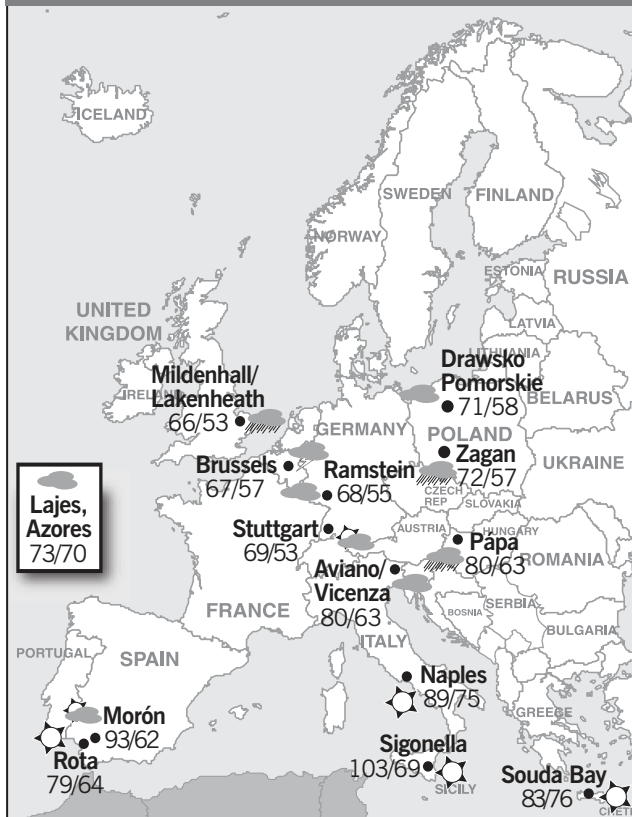
Prime rate	3.25
Interest Rates Discount rate	0.75
Federal funds market rate	0.09
3-month bill	0.06
30-year bond	1.93

WEATHER OUTLOOK

MONDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



MONDAY IN EUROPE



TUESDAY IN THE PACIFIC



The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

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MILITARY

Brigade command cleared of misconduct

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The leadership of an Army aviation brigade has been cleared of wrongdoing following a lengthy investigation into misconduct complaints, the 18th Airborne Corps said last week.

The 101st Airborne Division's Combat Aviation Brigade, which came under scrutiny in April after soldiers on an official trip visited a Polish strip club where a senior battalion officer went missing, was probed after various complaints were filed against the command.

"An exhaustive, months-long follow-on investigation led by a brigadier general identified no adverse findings against Colonel Travis Habhab or his subordinate leaders," Capt. Javon Starnes, a spokesman for 18th Airborne Corps, said in a statement.

Habhab is the commander of the Fort Campbell, Ky.-based brigade, which in April completed a nine-month rotation to Europe in support of the military's Atlantic Resolve campaign, focused on deterring Russian aggression.

Bullying, instances of suicidal thoughts at the brigade's headquarters company and drunken

carousing by officers were among the problems reported within the unit, according to internal command documents and Inspector General complaints obtained by Stars and Stripes.



Habhab

In May, the Fort Bragg, N.C.-based 18th Airborne Corps sent a senior officer to Fort Campbell to investigate allegations of wrongdoing, the nature of which were not disclosed by the command.

But during the brigade's Eu-

rope rotation, there were indications of a morale problem. A command climate survey of the brigade's headquarters company conducted during the Europe deployment found that 44% of those polled "reported knowledge" of suicidal thoughts and 25% reported some type of bullying behavior in the unit.

And in April, the brigade was embroiled in scandal after revelations emerged about a battalion trip approved as a tour of World War II sites.

On the first night of the trip, soldiers drank heavily and went to the off-limits Club Obsession in

the seaside city of Gdansk, according to an Army investigation report obtained by Stars and Stripes.

The battalion's executive officer went missing for a day after he was likely drugged and was charged thousands of dollars on his credit card, the investigation report said.

The battalion commander who organized the September staff ride was issued a General Officer Memorandum of Reprimand and will retire, while the executive officer faces separation, Army officials said last month. Other members of the unit also were punished.

Review: Soldier says her commander called her 'a stupid little Black girl'

FROM PAGE 1

officer, but that decision has been appealed and is under high-level review. Stars and Stripes is withholding the name of the battalion commander pending the review.

Mohammed, in an interview with Stars and Stripes, said she believes there were numerous investigative oversights.

"In my 21 years in the Army I've never experienced anything like this," said Mohammed, a prior enlisted soldier, who after filing a complaint said she was forced out of her unit and is now in the process of transferring to another unit in Kaiserslautern.

Stars and Stripes obtained a redacted copy of the EO complaint and investigative findings. In the documents, Mohammed alleged that on April 16, she was having an end of week one-on-one meeting with her commander when she asked her boss why she was "trying to tarnish my reputation" by making unfair criticisms about her job performance with others in the brigade.

"She then laughed at my question and accused (me) of filing the anonymous IG complaint," Mohammed said in a sworn statement to the investigating officer.

The relationship between the two had deteriorated months earlier, Mohammed said, after her boss accused her of filing an unrelated Inspector's General complaint.

When Mohammed said she wasn't the one who made that complaint, her commander laughed and said, "you're a stupid little Black girl," according to Mohammed's sworn EO statement.

After the incident, Mohammed told the investigator that she was initially shocked and didn't know how to react.

"As I walked to my vehicle to

head home, I couldn't help but to break down because I felt defeated and discouraged," she said in the complaint.

The commander denied making the remarks about Black people and said two other soldiers were in the April 16 meeting.

"Absolutely not. I have never used that phrase, or any like it," the commander said in a sworn statement to the investigating officer.

Meanwhile, Mohammed contends she and her boss were in a one-on-one meeting that day.



Mohammed

The investigating officer's findings were heavily redacted so the rationale into the decision not to substantiate the allegations isn't entirely clear. The investigator, whose name also was redacted, did say that the battalion commander was "credible because she displayed confidence and conviction" in her denials.

Mohammed's EO complaint also references an earlier incident in October in which the commander is accused of saying within earshot "Why are Black people always late?"

Mohammed said she and another soldier, Erik Choron, were seated near their boss during a farewell dinner at a restaurant for another soldier when the incident happened.

Choron, who served as a first sergeant in the battalion until he recently moved to Fort Hood, said the comment took him by surprise.

"She just leaned over to her husband and said, 'Why is it that Black people are always late?'" Choron

said in an interview with Stars and Stripes. "I'm hard of hearing and I heard it clearly. So we definitely have an issue because it was loud."

Choron said he gave a sworn statement to the investigating officer about what he heard. That the allegations were found unsubstantiated was "horse shit," Choron told Stars and Stripes.

Several other soldiers who were seated nearby gave sworn statements that they never heard the battalion commander make the statement about Black people.

"The preponderance of evidence, gathered in sworn statement from participants sitting with and in close proximity ... does not support such a statement was made," the investigator said in the report.

The incident follows previous problems among senior leaders with the 589th Brigade Support Battalion, which is part of the 41st Field Artillery Brigade.

Former Lt. Col. Ronald Veldhuizen, the preceding battalion commander, was relieved in 2019 for "conduct unbecoming an officer" and retired at a lower grade, Weisman confirmed.

Mohammed said she decided to speak up because she is worried about a lack of accountability in the unit, which she suspects is concerned about maintaining "optics" given its recent turmoil.

"I have never experienced racism in the last 21 years of my career, up until now ... This entire experience has been traumatizing, and though we are heading in the right direction as a military, it's extremely unfortunate that toxic leaders are still amongst us," Mohammed said in her sworn statement.

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Blinken warns of China's growing nuclear ambitions

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he has "deep concern" over China's growing nuclear arsenal in comments to a meeting with Asian counterparts on Friday.

Speaking virtually at the ASEAN Regional Forum foreign ministers' meeting, Blinken told the closed-door gathering that China's expanding nuclear capabilities highlight how "Beijing has sharply deviated from its decades-old nuclear strategy based on minimum deterrence," according to a statement from State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Blinken also called on China to "abide by its obligations under the international law of the sea and cease its provocative behavior in the South China Sea," and raised "serious concerns about ongoing human rights abuses in Tibet, Hong Kong, and Xinjiang," according to the statement.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China believes in upholding "true multilateralism" and "maintaining regional peace and stability" in the face of the corona-

virus pandemic and "the resurgence of geopolitics," according to a statement from China's foreign ministry.

Without referring to the U.S. directly, Wang said countries should avoid interfering in each other's internal affairs, adding that Asian nations had been bullied by others in the past and didn't require "teachers" or "saviors."

The U.S. has sought to rally nations across Asia and beyond to push back against China's increasingly as-

sertive foreign policy. During a visit to India in late July, Blinken warned against "rising global threats to democracy" and sought to strengthen the Quad grouping of nations made up of the U.S., India, Japan and Australia. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin also recently returned from a trip to Southeast Asia, including stops in Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines.



Blinken

Marine Corps base installs electric vehicle chargers

Associated Press

ALBANY, Ga. — A southwest Georgia U.S. Marine Corps base is installing charging stations so it can begin using more electric vehicles.

Officials at Marine Corps Logistics Base Albany say it is one of a number of Georgia Power Co. customers getting aid from an \$18 million fund that helps build the infrastructure necessary for electric charging stations.

President Joe Biden earlier this year mandated that military bases

move toward all-electric vehicle fleets.

The base's fleet manager, Ronnie Williams, said the utility's fund is paying for two stations that can charge a vehicle in eight hours or less. The base eventually hopes to have 12. Williams said the base's public works branch will get electric pickup trucks as they become available through the General Services Administration.

Rules call for replacing current vehicles after six years or 60,000 miles.

MILITARY

Army to keep 7 sites open in Germany, Belgium

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. Army in Europe and Africa said Friday that it will keep seven sites in Germany and Belgium that were slated to close under a Pentagon plan to consolidate bases in Europe.

The Army said it will hold on to the bases because of “growing requirements in the European theater.”

In Germany, the military is retaining Barton Barracks in Ansbach, Pulaski Barracks in Kaiserslautern, Coleman Barracks in Mannheim, Husterhoeh Kaserne in Pirmasens, Weilimdorf Warehouse in Stuttgart and the Amelia Earhart Center in Wiesbaden.

In Belgium, Daumerie Caserne will also be kept.

Some sites that were slated to close have since emerged as key parts of an Army effort to enhance combat capabilities in Europe, which have become a priority amid concerns about a more assertive Russia.

“Through this assessment, it was found the sites should be retained as the requirements in growth are outpacing facility construction and renovation,” a USA-EUR-AF statement said.

Coleman Barracks in Mannheim has been especially important to Army efforts, serving as a hub for more than 800 armored vehicles and associated pieces of equipment.

Keeping Coleman Barracks will provide easier access for regionally allocated forces because of its proximity to the autobahn, as well as to rail and barge loading facilities, the USA-EUR-AF state-



MICHAEL ABRAMS/Stars and Stripes

A row of U.S. Army cargo trucks sit in front of one of the old buildings at Coleman Barracks in Mannheim, Germany, in 2017.

ment said.

Barton Barracks in Ansbach also is seen as “optimal for future growth,” the Army said.

Retaining Pulaski Barracks in Kaiserslautern will mean preserving 76,000 square feet of administrative space to free capacity to support operations for personnel and equipment arriving into Europe, the Army said.

Meanwhile, Husterhoeh Kaserne in Pirmasens will be transferred to U.S. Air Forces in Eu-

rope-Africa, the Army said.

The decision to keep the various sites is separate from a plan to close scores of other bases in Germany as part of former President Donald Trump’s push to cut troop numbers in the country by about 12,000.

In that plan, numerous bases were slated to close, including U.S. European Command headquarters in Stuttgart.

President Joe Biden has put a hold on those plans while the Pen-

tagon conducts a wide-ranging review of its force posture around the world.

In 2015, the Defense Department announced its European Infrastructure Consolidation initiative, which called for the closure of numerous sites across Europe in a move that was expected to save around \$500 million annually once implemented.

The decision came after years of reductions to the bases and forces in Europe as part of the mil-

itary’s long post-Cold War draw-down on the Continent.

By 2017, however, U.S. European Command was having second thoughts about some aspects of the plan in light of a more volatile security environment in Europe.

By 2018, the Pentagon had issued its own directive to the Army to examine its basing plan in Europe.

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Japan retools plan for F-15 upgrades by losing US anti-ship missiles

By HANA KUSUMOTO

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Japan is moving forward with a stalled plan to upgrade some of its F-15 Eagle fighters, but is ditching plans to arm them with expensive, U.S.-made, anti-ship missiles, the Ministry of Defense said Thursday.

Making the long-range, stand-off missiles compatible with the F-15s, which the United States has not previously done, adds to the project cost and would delay the upgrades, according to information the ministry provided at a Thursday media briefing.

Japan had initially planned to equip 68 F-15s of the Japan Air Self-Defense Force with Long Range Anti-Ship Missiles, or LRASM, as a defense against ships and landing forces. The LRASM is a stealthy, air-launched anti-ship cruise missile.

The cost, however, skyrocketed from the initial appraisal after parts of the project were revised,

including a plan for replacement parts and integrating the missile systems to Japanese specifications, ministry officials said at the briefing. Japanese government officials typically speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

The equivalent of about \$354.9 million allocated for the project last year was not spent, an official said. The ministry also decided not to allocate about \$193.8 million for the project in this year’s budget and instead continued to negotiate the cost with the U.S.

After reviewing the program and further negotiations with the U.S. Air Force and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, the ministry dropped plans for the anti-ship missiles, officials said.

Nonetheless, the estimated cost to upgrade the fighters rose \$3.6 million, according to information the ministry provided.

The F-15s will be equipped instead with the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile, an air-launched

cruise missile. Further improvements will include increasing the payload from four to eight missiles and improving the fighters’ electronic warfare capabilities. The JASSM has a shorter range and higher visibility than the more expensive long-range, stealthy version.

“Although the cost has increased since the Medium Term Defense Program was established, the role of F-15s as a missile carrier by utilizing high missile-loading capability is important,” according to a briefing paper the ministry provided.

Japan planned on upgrading about 80 of its 201 F-15s, according to the Mid-Term Defense Program. The remainder, which are not suitable for modernization, will be replaced by F-35A and F-35B Lightning II stealth, multi-role aircraft.

The ministry is considering installing domestic standoff missiles on F-2 fighter jets as an alter-



DIVINE COX/U.S. Air Force

An F-15J Eagle from the Japan Air Self-Defense Force takes off from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in February.

native plan for the anti-ship missile, officials said.

With increasing Chinese military assertiveness, the Defense Ministry has said that the missiles are necessary to increase Japan’s defense capabilities around the Nansei Islands, also called the Ryukyuus, a chain stretching southwest toward Taiwan, the Mainichi

newspaper reported Thursday.

The ministry plans to make a budget request for the project in the next fiscal year, which starts in April, and finish upgrades for 20 of the jets by March 2028, officials said at the briefing.

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PACIFIC

INDOPACOM: US has capability of defending Taiwan

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

The United States is capable of assisting and defending Taiwan in the event of a military crisis, the commander of all U.S. forces in the Pacific said Thursday.

“There is a narrative that we see often in the media that talks about the U.S. and the West in decline,” Adm. John Aquilino, head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, said during a virtual appearance at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado when asked to describe America’s ability to defend Taiwan.

“I think what I’d start with is that that narrative is certainly being pushed by our adversaries,” Aquilino said. “I want to be very clear — we have the world’s greatest military on the planet.

“We are here to continue to operate to ensure peace and prosperity through the region, and we have to be in a position to ensure that status quo remains as it applies to Taiwan.”

Aquilino said Beijing’s heavy-handed actions in Hong Kong since last year have heightened his concern over China’s intentions toward Taiwan, which the Communist Party of China re-

gards as a renegade province that must, at some point, become reunified with the mainland.

Beijing had guaranteed a degree of autonomy for Hong Kong when the British government turned the colony over to China in 1997. But last summer it imposed a new security law that was quickly used to imprison and harass pro-democracy advocates.



Aquilino

The move has left many international observers wondering if Beijing is planning overt military action to reunify Taiwan.

Chinese military aircraft have stepped up incursions into Taiwan’s air defense identification zone over the past year.

The U.S. State Department on Wednesday approved the sale of about \$750 million in arms to Taiwan, the first such sale by President Joe Biden’s administration. It includes 40 self-propelled howitzers.

The sale “interferes in China’s internal affairs and undermines China’s sovereignty and security interests,” a spokesman for Chi-



JASON WAITE/U.S. Navy

The guided-missile destroyer USS John Finn passes through the Taiwan Strait on March 10.

na’s Foreign Ministry said in a statement posted online Thursday.

“China will resolutely take legitimate and necessary countermeasures in light of the development of the situation,” said the statement, which offered no further details.

In light of China’s more aggressive posture toward Taiwan, Hong Kong and the contested South China Sea, questions about how the U.S. would respond to a military crisis in the Taiwan Strait are no longer academic.

During a conference call with reporters Sunday while in Guam, Gen. Charles Flynn, commander of U.S. Army Pacific, was asked

whether soldiers could rapidly deploy “in case Taiwan is invaded by China.”

“The Army is always able to rapidly deploy,” Flynn said. “And we have a range of forces out here in the Pacific — from forcible entry forces to motorized forces to sustainment, communications, cyber, electronic warfare, intelligence, security-force assistance — all ranges of capabilities within the Army, that can move at speed and at scale, to conduct operations across the region.”

Aquilino echoed Flynn in his remarks Thursday.

“The U.S. is ready for any contingency should it occur,” he said, touting the concept of “integrated

deterrence” in such an event.

“That view of integrated deterrence is designed for the entire joint force to be able to operate in a synchronized fashion in all domains — as we integrate cyberspace and space capabilities — as we do it with all forms of U.S. national power,” he said. “And as we synchronize those with our most critical asset — and that is our allies and partners.

“So, when we pull all those together, let me just say that I have a level of confidence that the U.S. military and Department of Defense is in a good place.”

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UK aircraft carrier, strike group makes port call on Guam

By **ALEX WILSON**
Stars and Stripes

The aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and its strike group made a port call Friday at U.S. Naval Base Guam, one of the group’s many stops as it moves across the Indo-Pacific.

Royal Navy Commodore Steve Moorhouse, commander of the strike group, said in a U.S. Navy news release Friday that the group has visited more than 20 nations since it departed the United Kingdom in May.

“Our visit to Guam provides an opportunity for some much-deserved rest and recreation,” he said. “We are grateful to the U.S. Navy for the use of their facilities, and we look forward to exploring this beautiful Pacific Island.”

Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero welcomed the strike group, while Naval Base Guam commander Capt. Mike Lockett described the group’s deployment as “an incredible and historic milestone for both the Royal Navy and the U.S. Navy,” according to the release.

Guam, which has vaccinated 80% of its population, reduced many of its coronavirus restrictions in July. However, about 100 new cases of COVID-19, the coronavirus respiratory disease, popped up in the past



U.S. NAVY

The aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, pictured here sailing through the South China Sea last week, made a port call at U.S. Naval Base Guam on Friday.

week. Most of those infections occurred among the unvaccinated.

U.K. sailors will follow Naval Base Guam’s policies and local regulations, including coronavirus preventative measures, during their stay, according to the Navy.

In mid-July, the BBC reported an outbreak of approximately 100 coronavirus cases aboard ships of the U.K. carrier strike

group, despite having a 100% vaccination rate. U.K. Secretary of Defense Ben Wallace subsequently confirmed that crew aboard four ships had tested positive for the virus.

The strike group’s stop in Guam concludes roughly the first third of the group’s deployment, which is slated to cover 26,000 nautical miles over 7½ months and visits to 40 nations. The strike group is slated to ar-

rive in Japan in September.

The Queen Elizabeth is escorted by numerous Royal Navy vessels, the Royal Netherlands Navy frigate HNLMS Evertsen and the guided-missile destroyer USS The Sullivans. F-35B Lightning II aircraft from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 211 are also embarked on the ship.

Before arriving on Guam, the group steamed through the contested South China Sea, according to a tweet Wednesday from the U.S. Navy.

The strike group has also participated in several exercises, including its first operation alongside the USS Ronald Reagan strike group in the Gulf of Aden on July 12.

The HMS Queen Elizabeth’s Indo-Pacific presence is the first U.K. strike group deployment to the region in 25 years. The carrier is making its first operational deployment.

The Royal Navy has said it intends to send two more vessels to the Western Pacific. The HMS Spey and HMS Tamar, River-class offshore patrol vessels, will be permanently deployed in the region sometime this month, a Royal Navy spokesman said in July.

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WAR ON TERRORISM

Taliban overrun 3 provincial capitals

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN
AND ZUBAIR BABAKARKHAIL
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban overran three provincial capitals in Afghanistan on Sunday, including the strategic northern city of Kunduz, officials said. They are the latest in a string of battlefield wins by the insurgents, who have stepped up attacks as American troops withdraw from the country.

Kunduz — a key commercial hub with a population of more than 350,000 people and capital of a province with the same name — is the biggest city to fall to the Taliban since the withdrawal of international forces began in May.

The Taliban released inmates from the local prison after entering the city, while offices of the provincial governor and police chief were evacuated, Maj. Abdul Hadi, a spokesman for the Afghan military in Kunduz, told Stars and Stripes.

Heavy fighting between Taliban fighters and Afghan security forces continued throughout the day, according to witnesses.

“The problem is that the enemy is hiding in people’s houses and it is hard to target them, because of civilians,” Hadi said.

All government facilities but the city’s airport and main army barracks had fallen to the Taliban as of Sunday afternoon, provincial council member Abdul Ahad Torial Ka-



LORENZO TUGNOLI/For The Washington Post

Hundreds of inmates are held inside the central prison in Kunduz, Afghanistan.

kar said in a telephone interview. But fighting around the airport was ongoing, Kakar said.

The Taliban seized Kunduz for about two weeks in 2015, but eventually withdrew after the U.S. began airstrikes. The insurgents entered the city center for a brief period a year later before being driven out again.

The Taliban on Sunday also seized the capital of neighboring Takhar province, Taleqan, after heavy fighting in several areas, local officials said.

“No government forces are left in Taleqan, which fell late in the afternoon,” provincial council member

Mir Ahmad Qasim said.

Sar-e-Pul, the capital of another northern province with the same name, was a third provincial capital to fall to the Taliban the same day.

After Taliban fighters seized control of the city in the morning, they set fire to government buildings, Masooma Shadab, a former lawmaker from the province, told Stars and Stripes.

“Many residents have been killed in the city, but no one can go and retrieve the dead bodies from the streets because everyone is afraid of the Taliban,” Shadab said in a telephone interview.

Maulavi Noor Mohammad Baig,

a provincial council member in Sar-e-Pul, also confirmed the fall of the province, and called on Kabul to send in reinforcements.

“The situation is very bad, the central government must send quick support,” Baig said.

The fall of the three provincial capitals came a day after the Taliban overtook Sheberghan, the capital of northern Jawzjan province. And on Friday, Taliban fighters seized Zaranj in western Nimroz province, the first provincial capital to fall to the insurgents since U.S. and international forces began withdrawing from Afghanistan. Afghanistan’s Interior Ministry has at-

tempted to play down the Taliban advances, saying Afghan forces continue to fight to regain full control of the provincial capitals.

The fighting comes after the bulk of U.S. and foreign troops have already been pulled out of the country. Those remaining are set to leave by Aug. 31.

The U.S. military continues to conduct airstrikes against the Taliban to support Afghan forces in the waning days of the war. But it’s not clear if these strikes will continue once the drawdown is complete. Military officials have previously said future “over-the-horizon” support will target terrorist groups like al-Qaida and Islamic State, but not necessarily the Taliban. While the Taliban have seized control of large swaths of rural territory since their latest offensive began in May, they have largely avoided urban areas until recently. Fighting in cities such as Herat and Lashkar Gah — the capital of Helmand province — is ongoing.

On Saturday, the United Nations’ special envoy for Afghanistan asked the U.N. Security Council to issue a declaration calling for an end to attacks on Afghan cities.

Afghanistan is at a “dangerous turning point” as the U.S. is about to depart, and a shift to urban fighting would likely result in “massive casualties” and damage to infrastructure, Deborah Lyons said in a statement.

Paratrooper faces court-martial after deadly Syrian firefight last year

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

An 82nd Airborne Division soldier whose patrol came under fire in Syria last August will face court-martial for a series of charges that include violating orders and reckless endangerment, the military said last week.

Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue referred the case against Sgt. 1st Class Robert Nicoson to trial, division spokesman Lt. Col. Brett Lea said in an email Thursday.

Nicoson’s case underwent an Article 32 preliminary hearing in May, similar to a civilian grand jury proceeding, to review evidence against him on charges related to several incidents, including a patrol that got caught up in a deadly firefight near the northeastern Syrian town of Qamishli on Aug. 17, 2020.

“It is alleged that Sgt. 1st Class Nicoson was involved in incidents of violating orders, reckless endangerment, making unlawful threats and obstruction of justice after the fact,” Lea said.

The charge sheet will not be

available until Nicoson is arraigned, which could be in the next couple of weeks, Lea said.

Nicoson’s attorney, Phillip Stackhouse, did not immediately return a request for comment on the case. Stackhouse told Stars and Stripes after the May 20 hearing at Fort Bragg, N.C., that prosecutors did not call a single witness and instead relied on a “very thin Army CID (Criminal Investigation Command) investigation” and a low burden of proof to push for court-martial.

Prosecutors also provided the defense with two classified investigation reports “just prior to the hearing” that they had not previously made available, Stackhouse said. Both investigations, conducted before any Army CID involvement, “contained very favorable evidence for SFC Nicoson,” he said.

“While I can’t go into the facts contained within those investigations yet, I think it’s fair to say that SFC Nicoson was not even in the country at the time two of the charges are alleged to have occurred,” he said. Some of the charg-

es stem from a patrol in June, and from events after the August firefight, Stackhouse said in an earlier phone interview.

The defense entered both records into evidence and sought to have them declassified, Stackhouse said.

The May proceedings were recessed to allow the preliminary hearing officer to review and consider evidence before issuing a report to the commander, said Lt. Col. Mike Burns, division spokesman at the time.

“Long story short — new information was made available and is being considered,” Burns said.

Military officials have declined to discuss specifics of the charges against Nicoson. Nicoson was a platoon sergeant with the 82nd Airborne Division’s Blackhorse Troop, 1st Squadron, 73rd Cavalry Regiment on what Operation Inherent Resolve has described as a routine anti-Islamic State patrol last August when a firefight broke out at a Syrian checkpoint.

A Syrian fighter was killed and two others were wounded in the



JODI EASTHAM/U.S. Army

A Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve patrol encountered a hostile pro-Syrian regime militia at a checkpoint near Qamishli, Syria, on Feb. 12, 2020.

firefight, but there were no coalition casualties. It was one of several high-profile altercations last year between U.S. military patrols and pro-regime Syrian forces or their Russian backers in the civil war that began in 2011.

Nicoson had been under consideration for a Bronze Star with “V” device for valor for his actions during the battle, at least until September, Stackhouse said earlier this year. Nicoson’s wife, Beverly, told Stars and Stripes via email earlier this year it wasn’t clear why the Army went from considering an award to seeking punishment.

Prosecutors claim he put the platoon at risk by going where they shouldn’t have been, then threatened Syrian forces before the fighting broke out, Stackhouse said. Prosecutors do not allege misconduct during the actual gunbattle or say that Nicoson started the firefight, he said.

The charges are merely accusations, said Lea, the division spokesman.

“The accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty,” he said.

MILITARY

Ukraine visits Ramstein to up cybersecurity

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Ukrainian officers training with U.S. airmen last week reviewed secure communication methods that could help Ukraine in its seven-year conflict with Russia.

U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa proposed the visit by 10 members of the Ukrainian air forces, the first to Ramstein Air Base in more than two years, to enhance cooperation between the two militaries, Air Force officials said.

“Especially because of war ... we are trying to develop a secure communications system with encryption, like a secret network,” said Col. Yevhen Puchkov, a Ukrainian air force command staff member who leads a department focused on cybersecurity and other communications systems.

Air advisers from the 435th Contingency Response Support Squadron at Ramstein hosted the group and organized sessions on combat communications and air traffic control.

“COVID being COVID, we’ve had things on the table that have been canceled, and it’s important for us to get back involved with Ukraine,” said Kevin O’Brien, USAFE international affairs officer for Romania and Ukraine. “It’s an extremely important area and an extremely difficult situa-

tion right now there. It’s on our periphery, and we need to be involved.”

Ukraine and Russia have been fighting since 2014, when Russia seized the Crimean Peninsula. Ukrainian defense officials have said the conflict between their troops and Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine has killed at least 14,000 people.

Earlier this year, Kyiv accused Moscow of launching cyberattacks on its internet networks as part of a “hybrid war” against Ukraine, a charge that Russia denies, Reuters reported.

As it looks to strengthen its communications systems against Russian interference, Ukraine also wants to develop mobile communications capabilities in the field, O’Brien said.

“Everything they have is tied to a base,” he said. “Before they purchase equipment and invest, we wanted to show them how we do it.”

At Kapaun Air Station in Kaiserslautern, the Ukrainians saw a self-contained network, brimming with wires, where the 1st Communications Maintenance Squadron trains to perform emergency repairs, upgrades and maintenance.

The Ukrainians also were taken to the unit’s 65-foot tower, on which airmen practice climbing and rappelling. The skills are needed to maintain high-frequen-



PHOTOS BY JENNIFER H. SVAN/Stars and Stripes

Staff Sgt. A.J. Juarez, a C-17 and C-5 crew chief, shows Capt. Volodymyr Bren, right, and Volodymyr Shkrobtak, Ukraine air force air traffic controllers, an operations manual for the C-17 inside the cockpit during a tour of the aircraft on Thursday, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany.



Airmen with the 1st Communications Maintenance Squadron show members of the Ukraine air force a machine that can repair fiber optic cables at Kapaun Air Station in Kaiserslautern, Germany.



Airmen show Ukraine air force members a 65-foot tower on which they practice climbing and rappelling at Kapaun Air Station.

cy towers at Lajes Field in the Azores that support communications over the Atlantic Ocean.

“Do you guys do the same thing?” someone asked the Ukrai-

nians as they gazed up at the tower.

“We are too old for this job,” one of the Ukrainian officers quipped in response.

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ANNOUNCING THE BEST OF 2021



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VIRUS OUTBREAK

US bases in Italy enact new virus restrictions

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — New COVID-19 restrictions for entry into restaurants and other venues took effect Friday on U.S. military installations throughout Italy, much the same as they did in the rest of the country.

Service members at U.S. Army Garrison Italy, headquartered in Vicenza, must be vaccinated to eat in the food court or at restaurants, or use the gym and movie theater, according to a recent general order.

Unit leaders will conduct spot checks for vaccination cards, garrison officials said.

Proof of a negative coronavirus test or recovery from the virus isn't being accepted for entry under the Army general order, but officials were discussing whether to amend the order to include those alternatives, a garrison spokesman said.

Requirements at Naval Support Activity Naples and Aviano Air Base for the same activities were more consistent with an Italian decree requiring people 12 and older to show one of the following: proof of vaccination, recovery from COVID-19 within the last six months or a negative test within the past 48 hours.

The requirements were approved by Italy last month to stem the rise in COVID-19 case numbers

fueled by the highly contagious delta variant.

People who meet the requirements are eligible for Italy's "green pass" certification, allowing them inside restaurants, museums, bars, sports arenas and other places.

The U.S. Embassy in Italy announced this week that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention vaccination card would be accepted as equivalent to the green pass.

Military officials have said they are working with Italy to allow vaccinated Americans to be registered in the Italian green pass system, but they aren't sure when or if that will happen.

In Germany, vaccinated Americans can present their CDC cards to off-base pharmacies, receive a QR code and enter them into a smartphone app that verifies their status.

The documentation requirements don't apply to entry for exchange stores, commissaries, hospitals, religious services, schools or day care centers at the Italy installations. Most outdoor activities will not be affected, military officials said.

At NSA Naples Capodichino, signs explaining the requirements were posted Friday just inside the door at the Bella Napoli food court.

The base said a "watch team" will spot-check documentation at

food courts and restaurants at Capodichino and its support site in Gricignano di Aversa.

"Though we may not have people checking at the front door, members of our watch team will be roving periodically to check for proof of a green certification," NSA Naples said in a Thursday Facebook post. "By sitting at tables indoors, our community members are agreeing to random green certification verification."

But in other cases, such as at the gym, indoor pool or bowling alley, NSA Naples warned people that they could be asked to show verification at the door.

At the Capodichino gym, an attendant was verifying certification Friday.

Base officials said they will check certification at the movie theater and warned people not to buy tickets online if they couldn't show documentation. They advised people to carry paperwork, such as a CDC card, or have clear photos of their documents.

Aviano Air Base officials said personnel will check for vaccine documentation at all venues where they are necessary for entry, during a Facebook town hall meeting Thursday.

Those who violate the measure can be fined up to \$1,000, base officials said.

Brig. Gen. Jason E. Bailey, com-



ALISON BATH/Stars and Stripes

New COVID-19 restrictions for unvaccinated people took effect Friday in Italy, including on U.S. military installations. At Naval Support Activity Naples, the new rules were posted just inside the door of the Bella Napoli food court at the installation's Capodichino site.

mander of the 31st Fighter Wing at Aviano, said during the meeting that it is likely the Defense Department will soon mandate vaccination for its personnel.

Naval Air Station Sigonella said in a Friday Facebook post that proof of vaccination, along with an ID card, is required at restaurants, gyms, the bowling center, movie theater, a pub and other venues.

The base will verify vaccination status at points of sale and by roving personnel, the post said. More information will be available soon on the ability to participate in sports, Sigonella officials said.

Stars and Stripes reporters Nancy Montgomery and Norman Llamas contributed to this report.
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Most South Korean troops already vaccinated against coronavirus

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — South Korea's military has vaccinated nearly all of its service members on a voluntary basis, according to the country's defense minister.

South Korea's Ministry of National Defense reported Wednesday that 93.6% of the country's 550,000 active-duty service members received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. The second round of vaccinations is expected to be completed by Aug. 13, according to a government spokesperson.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in applauded the development in a meeting with the country's Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"The military is the first to achieve mass COVID-19 immunization in our country, except care hospitals and so on," Moon said after the briefing, according to a spokeswoman from the presidential palace. "The public, in general, could refer to the case of the



Stars and Stripes

Doses of the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine are prepared March 11 at Osan Air Base, South Korea.

military when to accomplish mass immunization."

Over a million vaccines were donated to South Korea by the United States this year, much of which was intended for the military. The coronavirus vaccine is voluntary for South Korean troops and "it's up to them to get it or not," a defense ministry official told Stars and Stripes on a customary condition of anonymity Fri-

day.

Despite having had broader access to the vaccine for a longer period of time, the inoculations appear to be less compelling for the 1.3 million troops serving in the U.S. military. In July, 70% of service members had received a first dose and 62% were fully vaccinated, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at the time.

That percentage mirrors the

vaccination rate of the civilian population, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday. The CDC reported that 70% of U.S. adults received a first dose of the vaccine, a goal President Joe Biden aimed to accomplish by July 4.

Although South Korean troops may opt to remain unvaccinated, they are heavily pressured by their leaders to become vaccinated, said Lee Kwang Woo, a retired South Korean special forces soldier and a former commander in the Eighth Army's U.S.-South Korea joint support group.

"Once the vaccine gets to each unit, they don't have any choice to refuse that," he told Stars and Stripes in an interview Friday. "They have to get that vaccine."

Lee noted that cultural differences between the two militaries may have played a role in the discrepancy in vaccination rates.

"If I, as a soldier, refuse the vaccine and eventually get the virus, then what about my squad, pla-

toon and company members," Lee said, referring to breakthrough infections among vaccinated individuals. "That's kind of a burden. So, everybody has to have that vaccine."

As the highly contagious delta variant of the coronavirus continues to spread, several news outlets reported this week that Austin was mulling whether to make the vaccines mandatory for U.S. troops.

A mandatory vaccine would require a presidential waiver, according to a Justice Department memo dated July 6. While it's unclear whether Biden would approve such a waiver for U.S. service members, the president announced last week that federal workers needed proof of their vaccinations, or else comply with extra social distancing measures, face mask policies and weekly COVID-19 tests.

Stars and Stripes reporter Yoo Kyong Chang contributed to this report.
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VIRUS OUTBREAK

US now averaging 100K new infections a day

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The COVID-19 outbreak in the United States crossed 100,000 new confirmed daily infections Saturday, a milestone last exceeded during the winter surge and driven by the highly transmissible delta variant and low vaccination rates in the South.

Health officials fear that cases, hospitalizations and deaths will continue to soar if more Americans don't embrace the vaccine. Nationwide, 50% of residents are fully vaccinated and more than 70% of adults have received at least one dose.

"Our models show that if we don't (vaccinate people), we could be up to several hundred thousand cases a day, similar to our surge in early January," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention director Rochelle Walensky said on CNN last week.

It took the U.S. about nine months to cross 100,000 average daily cases in November before peaking at about 250,000 in early January. Cases bottomed out in June, averaging about 11,000 per day, but six weeks later the num-



STEFAN JEREMIAH/AP

Hundreds of COVID-19 survivors march across the Brooklyn Bridge on Saturday in New York.

ber is 107,143.

Hospitalizations and deaths are also increasing, though all are still below peaks seen early this year before vaccines became widely available. More than 44,000 Americans are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, according to the CDC, up 30% in a week and nearly four times the number in

June. More than 120,000 were hospitalized in January.

The seven-day average for deaths rose from about 270 deaths per day two weeks ago to nearly 500 a day as of Friday, according to Johns Hopkins University. Deaths peaked at 3,500 per day in January. Deaths usually lag behind hospitalizations, as the dis-

ease normally takes a few weeks to kill.

The situation is particularly dire in the South, which has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the U.S. and has seen smaller hospitals overrun with patients.

In the Southeast, the number of hospitalized COVID-19 patients jumped 50% to a daily average of

17,600 over the last week from 11,600 the previous week, the CDC said. Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky represent 41% of the nation's new hospitalizations, the CDC said, twice their overall share of the population.

Alabama and Mississippi have the lowest vaccination rates in the country: less than 35% of residents are fully inoculated, according to the Mayo Clinic. Georgia, Tennessee and the Carolinas are all in the lowest 15 states.

Alabama saw more than 65,000 doses wasted because health providers couldn't find people to take them before they expired, according to State Health Officer Scott Harris. That represents less than 1.5% of the more than 5 million coronavirus vaccines doses that Alabama has received.

"Sixty-five thousand doses have been wasted. That's extremely unfortunate when we have such a low vaccination rate and of course, there are so many people in the world that still don't have access to the vaccine," Harris said.

US military on Guam reimposes mask mandate

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Military installations on Guam reimposed their mask policies after a spike in new cases of the coronavirus, just a week after the civilian government relaxed many of its pandemic restrictions.

All personnel on Defense Department installations, which include Naval Base Guam and Andersen Air Force Base, must wear masks indoors or outdoors when someone from another household is present, according to a statement Wednesday by Joint Region Marianas.

Masks are not required during physical training, the joint region said.

The policy applies to anyone on a DOD installation, regardless of vaccination status, according to the statement, which attributed the about-face to "an increase in CO-

VID-19 positive cases among military members," along with an increase in operational tempo and an influx of temporarily assigned personnel.

About 4,000 troops, including soldiers from the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, 1st Special Forces Group and the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, took part in the monthlong Forager 21 exercise on Guam that started in late July.

Service members and Defense personnel on temporary duty are restricted to their installations except for official duties, according to the order, unless they are fully vaccinated or have recovered from COVID-19 in the past three months and are free of symptoms.

The mandate comes one week after the island territory reached 80% of its adult population vaccinated. Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero rescinded limits on social gatherings,

canceled social distancing guidelines and allowed local businesses to reopen at full capacity.

Then new cases began to spike. Guam's Joint Information Center reported 40 newly infected people between July 23 and 30. Between Saturday and Friday, it reported another 132 new cases.

A spokeswoman for Guerrero said the spike was expected as the island opens up and restrictions are lifted.

"Many of these cases have been attributed to the spread among military members, which prompted the reinstatement of the mask mandate on military bases earlier this week," Krystal Paco-San Agustin wrote in an email Friday to Stars and Stripes.

Twenty of Guam's 29 new cases reported Thursday evening by the Joint Information Center could be attributed to contact tracing, Paco-

San Agustin said.

"This was to be expected," she said. "The situation hasn't worsened, evidenced by the minimal number of COVID-19 admissions in our hospitals."

Only three of the 21 cases reported Friday could be attributed to contact tracing, according to center data released Friday.

Paco-San Agustin did not reply to an email asking for the number of military related cases as of Friday. Joint Region Marianas spokeswoman Lt. Cmdr. Katie Koenig could not be reached by phone or email Friday.

The vaccination rate for active-duty service members on the island rests just below the local population at 76.3%, Koenig wrote in an email Tuesday to Stars and Stripes.

"One of the greatest challenges now is maintaining the positive

momentum and avoiding complacency," she said. "While we are making positive progress, the COVID-19 pandemic is still affecting our communities and we must remain vigilant, encourage all service members to make the decision to get vaccinated and maintain our mission readiness to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific region."

Joint Region Marianas will continue to "vigorously" assess COVID-19 policies to ensure the military is protecting their own and members of the local community, Koenig said.

Guam has seen 8,673 positive cases of COVID-19, the coronavirus respiratory disease, during the pandemic, and 143 deaths, the Joint Information Center reported Friday.

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For 4th week, protesters in France decry virus pass rules

Associated Press

PARIS — Thousands of people marched in Paris and other French cities Saturday for a fourth consecutive week of protests against the COVID-19 health passes that everyone in the country will need shortly to enter cafes, trains and other venues.

The demonstrations came two days after France's Constitu-

tional Council upheld most provisions of a new law that expands the locations where health passes are needed to enter.

Starting Monday, the pass will be required in France to access cafes, restaurants, long-distance travel and, in some cases, hospitals. It was already in place for cultural and recreational venues, including cine-

mas, concert halls, sports arenas and theme parks with a capacity for more than 50 people.

With French riot police on guard, a largely peaceful crowd walked across Paris carrying banners that read: "Our freedoms are dying" and "Vaccine: Don't touch our kids." Some were also upset that the government has made COVID-19 vaccines mandatory for health care

workers by Sept. 15.

Dozens of street protests took place in other French cities as well, including Marseille, Nice and Lille. The French Interior ministry said there were 237,000 protesters nationwide, including 17,000 in Paris.

Opponents say the virus pass limits their mobility and implicitly renders vaccines obligatory.

Polls, however, show that

most people in France support the health passes, which prove that people are vaccinated, have had a negative recent test or have recovered from COVID-19.

Muriel, 55, a Parisian who declined to give her last name, told The Associated Press that she especially protests "the disguised mandatory vaccination ... it's an incredible blow to our fundamental freedoms."

NATION

Senate work on infrastructure bill continues

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senators resumed a weekend session toward passage of a \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure package after running into opposition from a few Republicans who want to drag out final votes on one of President Joe Biden's top priorities.

The measure would provide what Biden has called a "historic investment" in public works programs, from roads and bridges to broadband internet access, drinking water and more. In a rare stroke of bipartisanship, Republicans joined Democrats on Saturday to advance the measure and more votes were expected Sunday. If approved, the bill would go to the House.

Despite the overwhelming support, momentum has dragged as a few Republican senators refused to yield 30 hours of required debate before the next set of procedural votes, which could delay swift passage of the package and result in a dayslong slog.

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La., a nego-

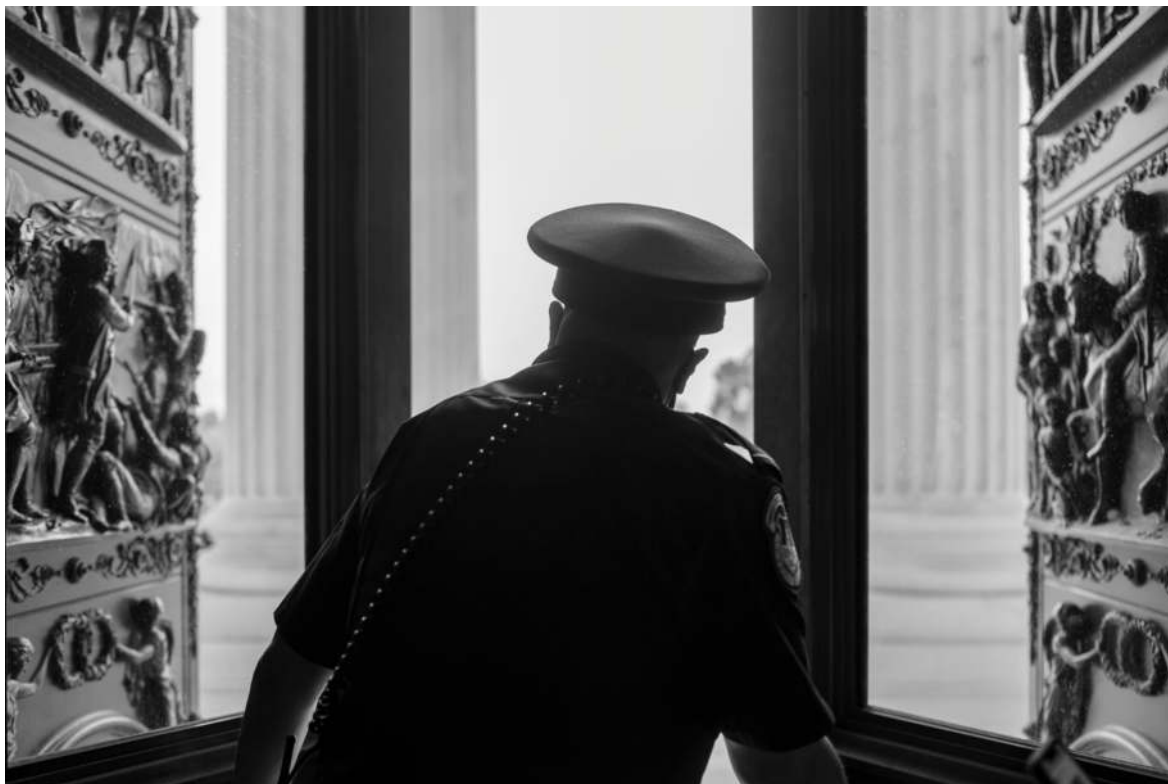
tiator on the bill, said about 17 to 18 Republicans have indicated they support the bill, which would ensure eventual passage, though that may not come until Tuesday.

"It could go quicker, but it's going," Cassidy said Sunday on CNN's "State of the Union," adding, "And that's the good thing, it's going."

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., has said he intends to get the bill done one way or another.

"We can get this done the easy way or the hard way," he said Saturday. Still, as the hours ticked away with no deal struck to quicken the process for considering amendments and final votes, Schumer said senators would resume at noon Sunday.

Senators were meeting for the second consecutive weekend to work on the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which is the first of Biden's two infrastructure packages. Once voting wraps up, senators immediately will turn to the next item on Biden's agenda,



J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE/AP

A U.S. Capitol Police officer keeps watch for arriving senators as the Senate votes to advance the \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill Saturday at the Capitol in Washington.

the budget outline for a \$3.5 trillion package of child care, elder care and other programs that is a much more partisan undertaking and expected to draw only Democratic support.

For some Republican senators, the back-to-back voting on Biden's big priorities is what they are trying to delay, hoping to slow or halt what appears to be a steady march to achieve the president's infrastructure goals.

Sen. Bill Hagerty, R-Tenn., an ally of Donald Trump and the for-

mer president's ambassador to Japan, was among those leading the effort for the Senate to take as much time as needed to debate and amend the bill.

"There's absolutely no reason to rush," Hagerty said during a floor speech Saturday.

Overcoming the 60-vote hurdle was a sign that the tenuous alliance between Republicans and Democrats could hold on the public works package. In all, 18 Republicans joined Democrats on the 67-27 vote to push the measure

past a filibuster.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky has so far allowed the bill to progress, despite the broadsides and name-calling coming from the former president. His vote Saturday — another "yes" — was closely watched. "This is a compromise," McConnell said.

Senators have spent the past week processing nearly two dozen amendments to the 2,700-page package, but so far none has substantially changed its framework.

Retired Marine whose troops planted US flag on Iwo Jima dies

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Dave Severance, the Marine company commander whose troops planted the American flag on Iwo Jima during World War II, a moment captured in one of the most iconic war photographs in history, has died. He was 102.

Severance died last Monday at his home in the San Diego suburb of La Jolla, according to the San Diego Union-Tribune.

Severance's company came ashore in the 10th wave of what



Severance

eventually would be about 70,000 Marines invading the island, about 660 miles south of Tokyo. They were met by some 20,000 Japanese.

On Feb. 23, 1945, the fifth day of fighting, about 40 members of Severance's company were sent up Mount Suribachi with orders to plant the flag.

When Navy Secretary James Forrestal, arrived on the island, he asked for it to be kept as a memento.

After it was removed, Severance ordered a second group of Marines to replace the flag with a bigger one. The second raising of the flag on Mount Suribachi was captured in a dramatic photo by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal who won a Pulitzer Prize.

The Marines would keep the first flag, and the Navy secretary

would get the replacement, which flew over Mount Suribachi for the rest of the battle. Both flags are now at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, Va.

Severance spent his retirement quietly trying to set the record straight that there were two flag-raising that February morning in 1945.

He cared about the flag story, he told the Union-Tribune in a 2012 interview, because it spoke to the courage and sacrifice he

witnessed every day for more than a month during the battle, one of the bloodiest of the war. About 75 percent of his company were wounded or killed.

Severance earned a Silver Star. Born Feb. 4, 1919, in Milwaukee, Severance grew up in Colorado and joined the Marines in 1938.

After leading Marines in WWII, he went on to fly nearly 70 missions in Korea as an aviator.

He retired from the Marine Corps in 1968.

Texas Democrats continue holdout, don't show for new session

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas Democrats still refused to return to the state Capitol on Saturday as Gov. Greg Abbott began a third attempt at passing new election laws, prolonging a monthslong standoff that ramped up in July when dozens of Democratic state lawmakers left the state and hunkered down in Washington, D.C.

"A quorum is not present," said Republican House Speaker Dade Phelan, who then adjourned the chamber until Monday.

More than 50 Democrats last month bolted to the nation's capital, but the pre-

cise whereabouts of each of them is unclear. In a joint statement Saturday, Democrats said 26 of them would remain "part of an active presence in Washington maintained for as long as Congress is working."

But there were also signs the stalemate may be thawing. Two of the Democrats who decamped last month returned to Austin on Saturday, and one of them said enough of his colleagues may also begin trickling back to secure a quorum next week. And, notably, Republicans did not invoke a procedural move that would give Phelan the authority to sign arrest war-

rants for missing lawmakers, as they did when the Democrats left town.

Democratic state Rep. Eddie Lucio III said those who might return were feeling the pull of personal and professional demands.

It was not just Democrats who were absent Saturday: Six Republicans were also out, including one who recently tested positive for COVID-19.

Heading into the weekend, Democratic leaders had not committed to sitting out the entire 30-day session, leaving open the possibility that enough could return at

some point to end the standoff. Republicans want to advance an overhaul of elections in Texas under legislation that largely remains the same despite the months of walkouts and protests by Democratic lawmakers.

Democrats made a bigger gambit — by decamping to Washington on chartered jets — to run out the clock on the GOP's second try. Democrats had hoped to exert pressure on President Joe Biden and Congress to pass federal voting rights legislation, but a Senate Republican filibuster continues to block such a measure.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman found swimming in 70-foot-tall water tank

AL ATHENS — A woman who broke through a barrier and climbed a ladder to the top of a municipal water tank was found swimming inside the massive container, authorities said.

A statement from the city of Athens said that after a contractor repainted the 350,000-gallon tank, an access hatch apparently wasn't secured properly.

A retired police officer contacted authorities after seeing the woman scale the 70-foot-tall tank, and firefighters found her swimming inside.

Police Chief Floyd Johnson said officers took the woman, who wasn't identified, for a mental evaluation. Workers planned to drain the tank and sanitize it, the city said, but no disruption in water service was expected and other tanks had clean water.

Airline starts direct, nonstop seaplane flights

MA BOSTON — Travelers between New York and Boston tired of the time-consuming hassles of crowded airports and commercial flights now have a more convenient, albeit pricey, alternative.

Tailwind Air has started direct, nonstop seaplane service between Manhattan and Boston Harbor.

The flights on eight-passenger aircraft between the New York Skyport on the East River and a floating dock in Boston Harbor take about 75 minutes.

Although the seaplanes can cut total travel times up to 60%, flights start at \$395 one way, which includes a standard-sized rolling bag up to 20 pounds. The service is also dog friendly.

University pays balances of nearly 3K students

WV INSTITUTE — A university in West Virginia used federal relief funds to pay off account balances for nearly 3,000 students who have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

West Virginia State University paid off balances for all degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students from March 13, 2020, through the summer 2021 term, WSAZ-TV reported. The school used \$816,000 from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, which covered tuition, housing and other fees.

The funds will be automatically applied to eligible student accounts, school officials said.

Invasive insect found in state for 1st time

RI PROVIDENCE — An invasive insect that can cause damage to native trees and agricultural crops was found in Rhode Island for the first time, state environmental officials said.



STEPHEN GROVES/AP

Hogging the town

Motorcycles fill the streets of Sturgis, S.D., as the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally begins. The annual rally returns just as coronavirus cases in the state are rising with the more contagious delta variant.

A single spotted lanternfly was found in an area in Warwick near Jefferson Boulevard recently, the state Department of Environmental Management said in an emailed statement. A photo of the insect was sent to the agency, and the state Division of Agriculture confirmed the sighting.

There is no known population of the insect present in the state, but the agency will conduct a survey of the area where it was found to determine if there is any further evidence of the creature.

The insect, native to Asia, feeds on agricultural crops such as grapes, apples and hops as well as maple, walnut and willow trees.

The insect was first detected in the U.S. in Pennsylvania in 2014 and has since spread to New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware and Virginia with individual finds in New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Human remains found in car in river for decades

NH LANCASTER — Human remains have been found in a car in the Connecticut River that may belong to a New Hampshire woman who disappeared in 1978.

A New Hampshire Fish and Game search team using new sonar equipment found the car south of a bridge that connects Lancaster and Lunenburg, Vt. The remains were found after a difficult search due to the vehicle's deteriora-

THE CENSUS

125 The approximate weight in pounds of a bighead carp caught last month that set a new state record, according to the Missouri Department of Conservation. Matt Neuling, of Perryville, Mo., shot the 125-pound, 5-ounce fish July 24 while bowfishing at Lake Perry, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported. The department estimated the fish was 10 years old.

tion and the amount of silt inside it, officials said.

Investigators said the car's license plate matched one registered to Alberta Leeman, 63, of Gorham, N.H., who disappeared in 1978. Her disappearance is not considered suspicious.

Leeman's daughter was at the scene Friday. She told WMUR-TV she never gave up looking for her mother and is grateful law enforcement did not stop either.

The car was not removed from the river because officials were concerned it would break into pieces under the stress of moving it.

Whale dies 3 months after move to States

CT MYSTIC — One of five beluga whales acquired from an aquarium in Canada after a legal fight with animal rights activists has died at its new home in Connecticut.

Officials at Mystic Aquarium, which specializes in beluga research, said in a Facebook post that the male whale had arrived in May with a preexisting medical condition. It died despite "round-the-clock medical treatment, test-

ing, and 24-hour monitoring," the aquarium said in a statement.

Connecticut-based Friends of Animals and other activists had sought to block the transport in a lawsuit last fall against the U.S. Commerce secretary and National Marine Fisheries Service, which had approved the research permit.

The group claimed the U.S. permit violated the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the National Environmental Policy Act because government officials did not adequately address the potential harm to the belugas from being moved to Mystic.

Man arrested after Native American statue stolen

MO KANSAS CITY — A man has been charged with receiving stolen property after Kansas City police recovered pieces of a statue of a Native American woman that was stolen.

The public helped detectives find a large section of the 400-pound, 7-foot-tall statue but it had already been cut into pieces, police said.

The statue was sheared from its bolts at the Francois Chouteau and

Native American Heritage Fountain in northern Kansas City, police said. It has an estimated value of \$80,000.

The fountain honors American Indians and French trader Francois Chouteau for their roles in founding Kansas City.

Worker death leads to \$11K fine for winery

OR SALEM — Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health Agency said it fined a Dundee winery \$11,100 for alleged violations of confined space rules after an investigation into the death of a worker.

A worker at Corus Estates & Vineyards LLC, also known as 12th & Maple Wine Co., was found unresponsive Feb. 1 in an empty 30,000-gallon wine tank, the Statesman Journal reported.

The man's task was to enter through the bottom and pump out about 500 gallons of wine remnants into another tank.

Low-pressure nitrogen gas was pumped in to prevent oxidation of the remnants and the man was asphyxiated as a result of the displacement of oxygen due to the nitrogen gas in the tank, according to OSHA.

OSHA has given Corus Estates & Vineyards 10 days to correct nine alleged violations. The winery said it plans to appeal the citations.

NATION

Calif.'s Dixie Fire becomes largest in state history

Associated Press

GREENVILLE — After four years of homelessness, Kesia Studebaker thought she finally landed on her feet when she found a job cooking in a diner and moved into a house in the small community of Greenville.

She had been renting for three months and was hoping stability would help her win back custody of her 14-year-old daughter. But in just one night, a raging wildfire tore through the mountain town and “took it all away,” she said.

Fueled by strong winds and bone-dry vegetation, the Dixie Fire grew to become the largest single wildfire in state history. People living in the scenic forestlands of Northern California faced a weekend of fear as it threatened to reduce thousands of homes to ashes.

“We knew we didn’t get enough

rainfall and fires could happen, but we didn’t expect a monster like this,” Studebaker said Saturday.

The Dixie Fire spanned an area of 700 square miles Saturday night and was just 21% contained, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Four firefighters were taken to the hospital Friday after being struck by a fallen branch. More than 20 people were initially reported missing, but authorities had contacted all but four of them by Saturday afternoon.

Cooler overnight temperatures and higher humidity slowed the spread of the fire, and temperatures topped 90 degrees Fahrenheit instead of the triple-digit highs recorded earlier in the week.

But the blaze and its neighbor-



NOAH BERGER/AP

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, left, accompanied by Cal Fire Assistant Region Chief Curtis Brown, surveys Greenville homes leveled by the Dixie Fire on Saturday in Plumas County, Calif.

ing fires, within several hundred miles of each other, posed an ongoing threat.

Studebaker sought shelter at an evacuation center before setting up her tent in a friend’s front yard.

She is counting on returning to her job if the restaurant where she works stays open. Her boss also evacuated when the town of Chester, northwest of Greenville, lost power and the smoke was so thick that it made it hard to

breathe.

Smoke from the fires blanketed Northern California and western Nevada, causing air quality to deteriorate to very unhealthy and, at times, hazardous levels.

Air quality advisories extended through the California’s San Joaquin Valley and as far as the San Francisco Bay Area to Denver, Salt Lake City and Las Vegas, where residents were urged to keep their windows and doors

shut. Denver’s air quality ranked among the worst in the world Saturday.

California’s fire season is on track to surpass last year’s season, which was the worst fire season in recent recorded state history.

Since the start of the year, more than 6,000 blazes have destroyed more than 1,260 square miles of land — more than triple the losses for the same period in 2020, according to state fire figures.

Calif. GOP nixes endorsement fight in Newsom recall

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The California Republican Party voted overwhelmingly Saturday not to endorse any candidate in the looming recall election that could remove Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom from office, sidestepping a potentially nasty fight over a GOP favorite that threatened to divide Republicans and depress turnout in the nationally watched race.

The lopsided vote to skip an endorsement — supported by about 90% of delegates attending at a virtual party meeting — reflected concerns that an internal feud among candidates and their supporters would cleave party ranks and sour Republicans who wouldn’t bother to vote if their candidate of choice was snubbed.

There are 24 Republicans on the recall

ballot, with leading contenders including talk radio host Larry Elder, former San Diego mayor Kevin Faulconer, former Olympian and reality TV personality Caitlyn Jenner, businessman John Cox, state legislator Kevin Kiley and former congressman Doug Ose.

Two of the state party’s most powerful figures — Republican National Committee members Harmeet Dhillon and Shawn Steel — earlier helped set the stage for an endorsement vote. But they reversed course Friday and urged delegates to avoid it.

“The polls are showing that the recall is in a statistical tie, and we cannot afford to discourage voters who are passionate about a particular candidate, yet may not vote because their favored candidate didn’t receive the endorsement,” they warned in an email

obtained by The Associated Press.

In the recall election, voters will be asked two questions: First, should Newsom be removed, yes or no? The second question will be a list of replacement candidates from which to choose. If a majority votes for Newsom’s removal, the candidate who gets the most votes on the second question becomes governor.

Republicans feared that fallout from an endorsement squabble could sap support from the critical first question on the ballot — whether or not to remove Newsom. If that vote fails to reach a majority, the results on the second question are irrelevant and the governor retains his job.

Some will see the party’s decision as a setback for Faulconer, who was considered an early favorite for the endorsement. Faulcon-

er had been seeking the nod, but his campaign later shifted gears, saying he no longer believed it was in the party’s interest to back a single candidate.

Cox, a conservative, earlier accused party insiders of trying to steer the endorsement to Faulconer, a political centrist elected in Democratic San Diego who some saw as a more viable statewide candidate in strongly Democratic California.

In a statement Saturday, Cox praised the delegates’ decision, adding that “the Republican Party must be united to recall Newsom. Nothing is more important.”

Newsom, meanwhile, has been stepping up his campaign activity with polls showing the race could go either way, as coronavirus cases again climb and populous areas of the state bring back mask rules loathed by many.

Crime historian conducts dig for D.B. Cooper case evidence

Associated Press

VANCOUVER, Wash. — Nearly 50 years after skyjacker D.B. Cooper vanished out the back of a Boeing 727 into freezing Northwest rain — wearing a business suit, a parachute and a pack with \$200,000 in cash — a crime historian is conducting a dig on the banks of the Columbia River in Vancouver, Wash., in search of evidence.

KOIN reported that Eric Ulis, a self-described expert on the infamous D.B. Cooper case, began a two-day dig on Friday. Ulis and four volunteers are



An undated artist sketch shows the skyjacker known as D.B. Cooper.

searching for evidence about 10 to 15 yards away from where a boy found \$6,000 of Cooper’s ransom money in 1980.

Ulis said his theory is that Cooper buried the parachutes, an attache case and the money at the same time, but dug smaller holes instead of one large one.

The case of Cooper has become infamous, not only in the Pacific Northwest but also in the country. The FBI Seattle field office called the investigation one of the longest and most exhaustive in the agency’s history.

On Nov. 24, 1971, the night before Thanksgiving, a man described as being in his mid-40s

with dark sunglasses and an olive complexion boarded a flight from Portland, Ore., to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. He bought his \$20 ticket under the name “Dan Cooper,” but an early wire-service report misidentified him as “D.B. Cooper,” and the name stuck.

Sitting in the rear of the plane, he handed a note to a flight attendant after takeoff. “Miss, I have a bomb and would like you to sit by me,” it said.

The man demanded \$200,000 in cash plus four parachutes. He received them at Sea-Tac,

where he released the 36 passengers and two of the flight attendants. The plane took off again at his direction, heading slowly to Reno, Nev., at the low height of 10,000 feet. Somewhere, apparently over southwestern Washington, Cooper lowered the aircraft’s rear stairs and jumped.

He was never found. But a boy digging on a Columbia River beach in 1980 discovered three bundles of weathered \$20 bills — nearly \$6,000 in all. It was Cooper’s cash, according to the serial numbers.

WORLD

Hezbollah vows retaliation for future Israeli attacks

Associated Press

BEIRUT—The leader of the militant Hezbollah group said Saturday his group will retaliate against any future Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon, a day after his supporters fired a barrage of rockets toward Israel.

Hassan Nasrallah said it would be wrong to assume Hezbollah would be constrained by internal divisions in Lebanon, or the coun-

try's harsh economic crisis.

Nasrallah's comments came a day after his group fired rockets toward Israel, calling it retaliation for Israeli airstrikes on southern Lebanon a day earlier.

Thursday's airstrikes — the first in years — were in response to mysterious rockets that were fired from Lebanon toward Israel on Wednesday.

Friday's rocket fire was the third

day of attacks along the volatile border with Lebanon, a major Middle East flashpoint where tensions between Israel and Iran, which backs Hezbollah, occasionally play out.

"Any airstrike by Israel's air force on Lebanon will be retaliated in a suitable way because we want to protect our country," Nasrallah said in a televised speech marking the 15th anniversary of the end of the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war.



MOHAMMAD ZAATARI/AP

A rocket launcher placed on a pickup truck used by Hezbollah to fire rockets near Israeli positions, is seen Friday in the southeastern village of Shwaya, near the border with the Golan Heights.

Refugees recover more bodies from river separating Tigray, Sudan

Associated Press

WAD EL-HILU, Sudan — Six more bodies have been found floating down the river separating Ethiopia's troubled Tigray region from Sudan, refugees and a physician said on Saturday. They urged Sudanese authorities and the U.N. to help in search efforts.

Around 50 bodies have been discovered

over the last two weeks in the Setit River, which flows through some of the most troubled areas of the nine-month conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region, according to Tigray refugees.

Physician Tewodros Tefera said Friday he personally witnessed refugees pull several bodies from the river over the past week. Tefera is a surgeon from the nearby

Tigray town of Humera who fled to Sudan at the start of the war.

Ethnic Tigrayans have accused Ethiopian and allied forces of atrocities while battling Tigray forces. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken asserted in March that "ethnic cleansing" has happened in parts of Tigray.

The latest discovery raised fears that

even more bodies could be dumped into the Setit, known in Ethiopia as the Tekeze. The refugees say the corpses found in recent days have been bloated and drained of color. Some had been mutilated, they say, including with severed genitals, gouged eyes and a missing limb. Others were found with their hands bound or had gunshot wounds.

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Netflix photos

“Resort to Love,” starring Christina Milian and Sinqua Walls, leans on family dynamics and a love triangle.

A roundabout road

Christina Milian embraces rom-com lessons while starring in Netflix film ‘Resort to Love’

BY RUTH ETIESIT SAMUEL
Los Angeles Times

For her latest Netflix rom-com, Christina Milian explores the indirect path to love.

“Love is like this journey that you don’t know where it’s gonna take you, but it makes you feel good,” Milian said about “Resort to Love,” now streaming on Netflix. “I think what attracts me most to [rom-coms] is kind of like the getaway and the fantasy of it. Then, of course, it had music, so anything related to music gets me back into my passion.”

Produced by Grammy-winner Alicia Keys, “Resort to Love” follows singer Erica Wilson (Milian) as she embarks on a journey of self-discovery after a failed engagement and shattered dreams of an album.

To snap Erica out of wallowing in despair, her confidante and talent agent, Amber, persuades her to take a gig in beautiful Mauritius. However, Erica is unwittingly tasked with performing at the wedding of her ex-fiance, Jason (Jay Pharoah), and has to hide their history from his new bride-to-be. Another surprise: She finally meets Jason’s brother, Caleb (Sinqua Walls), and romantic sparks fly.

Though Erica seeks her own escape from reality — and the genre lends itself to the departure — “Resort to Love” riffs off the traditional love triangle by centering on family and showing that neither life nor love are linear.

Former “Saturday Night Live”

star Pharaoh embraced the film as an opportunity to show a different side of himself. Apart from his childhood crush on Milian, Keys’ involvement and the storyline intrigued him.

“I wanted to be able to branch off and show my chops in a different way. I definitely think we achieved that in this movie,” Pharaoh said. “Showing people different sides, that’s what it’s all about. ... I’ve always had it; I just never put it out there like that.”

While Pharaoh’s character is secure in his new finance job in Charleston, S.C., he lives in the shadow of his distant older brother Caleb, a veteran of the U.S. Military Special Forces. When the macho man swoops in to make a move on Erica, it rocks Jason’s confidence, triggering an inferiority complex and forcing the two to face off at the bachelor party.

“That scene was definitely important for the movie. It’s like, dude, you’re great in your own right. As we all are,” Pharaoh said. “You just have to stay in your lane and be confident in your lane.”

Walls was touched by his character’s journey, as Caleb’s transition to the civilian lifestyle mirrored questions Walls had himself.

“As humans, we go through different phases where we’re always asking ourselves, ‘What is this and where am I going? And am I going in the right direction?’” said Walls. “Caleb walks into this movie having already been so regimented from a lifestyle of being in the military. Then he finds him-



Netflix

Milian embraced the opportunity to combine music with acting in “Resort to Love.”

self with no structure and figuring out what’s next. Through Erica, he learns to not put a button on it but to allow himself to let it breathe and discover what is going day by day.”

Walls hopes “Resort to Love” teaches viewers that life’s game plan is always evolving. Pharaoh hopes it encourages audiences to embrace the ebb and flow of life. Echoing those sentiments, Milian said the film is about freeing yourself and being open to love and life’s surprises.

“We have these expectations that we put on ourselves and sometimes, there’s a different plan,” Milian said. “When you think you’re going to go right, it was actually left, and when you go left, you find out this was where I was supposed to be. It’s OK to have a plan, but maybe you have to resort to something that you don’t expect. ... Somehow we’re able to find our answers in the oddest places.”

Aaliyah projects headed to streaming platforms

From wire reports

Aaliyah’s music is officially headed to streaming services.

Following the launch of a website promising #AaliyahIsComing on Aug. 5, the late Detroit singer’s record label announced that four of Aaliyah’s projects are headed to streaming platforms.

“We gone show you how to party,” Background Records announced in a tweet, along with release dates for four of her albums.



Aaliyah

“One in a Million,” Aaliyah’s 1996 album, will be released to streamers on Aug. 20; the self-titled “Aaliyah” will follow on Sept. 10; and two compilation albums, “I Care 4 U” and “Ultimate Aaliyah,” will be released on Oct. 8.

The bulk of Aaliyah’s catalog has been unavailable on streaming services and has been a rallying point for fans who want digital access to her music.

Wednesday’s tease prompted Aaliyah’s estate to release a statement denouncing those “who leech off of Aaliyah’s life’s work.”

Aaliyah died 20 years ago this month in a plane crash in the Bahamas. She was 22.

\$900 million deal locks in 14 ‘South Park’ movies

The “South Park” creators and ViacomCBS’ MTV Entertainment Studios have agreed to extend the animated show on Comedy Central through 2027 — or 30 seasons — and to produce 14 “South Park” made-for-streaming movies to run on subscription service Paramount+, according to an Aug. 6 news release.

Bloomberg News pegged the paycheck at \$900 million.

Two of those movies are promised in 2021.

The move is part of ViacomCBS’ growing commitment to its streamer, Paramount+, known as CBS All Access until this year.

The show has had two blockbuster specials in the past two years: The Emmy-nominated “South ParQ Vaccination Special,” which drew nearly 3.5 million total viewers this year, making it the top cable telecast so far in 2021, and “The Pandemic Special,” which was cable TV’s top scripted telecast in 2020.

Louis C.K. begins comeback run with tour

Comedian Louis C.K., who was accused of sexual misconduct by multiple women in 2017, is returning to stand-up comedy this week when he launches a nationwide tour.

C.K. announced the tour Aug. 4 on his website with shows in 30 cities, kicking off in Madison Square Garden in New York on Aug. 13.

In 2017, C.K., who was at the height of his notoriety in the world of stand-up comedy, was accused by numerous women of masturbating directly in front of them.

C.K., poked fun at the allegations made against him in an online comedy special posted on his website.

“How was your last couple of years? How was 2018 and 2019 for you guys? Anybody else get in global amounts of trouble?” he asked the crowd. “I learned a lot. I learned how to eat alone in a restaurant with people giving me the finger from across the room.”

In 2022, C.K. will be heading international for shows in Ukraine, Germany, Denmark and Romania.

Fenty boosts Rihanna’s estimated worth to \$1.7B

Singing sensation turned cosmetics queen Rihanna has officially joined the rarefied rank of billionaire.

The “B— Better Have My Money” singer is worth an estimated \$1.7 billion, becoming the wealthiest female musician — and second only to Oprah Winfrey as the richest entertainer in the world, Forbes announced Wednesday.

While the nine-time Grammy Award winner is known for her No. 1 hits like “Work,” “Umbrella” and “We Found Love,” and films such as “Ocean’s 8,” Robyn Fenty — known to the world as Rihanna — is also a fashion industry icon. In 2017, the former Cover Girl spokeswoman teamed up with French conglomerate LVMH to launch her Fenty Beauty cosmetics line.

“The majority of her \$1.7 billion estimated net worth is not from singing but from cosmetics,” Forbes editor Kerry Dolan said.

In 2018, Rihanna spearheaded Savage by Fenty, a lingerie line promoting body positivity and inclusivity, and followed up with a men’s collection in 2020.

Last year, she launched the Fenty skin care line. And last week, Rihanna teased a forthcoming fragrance line.

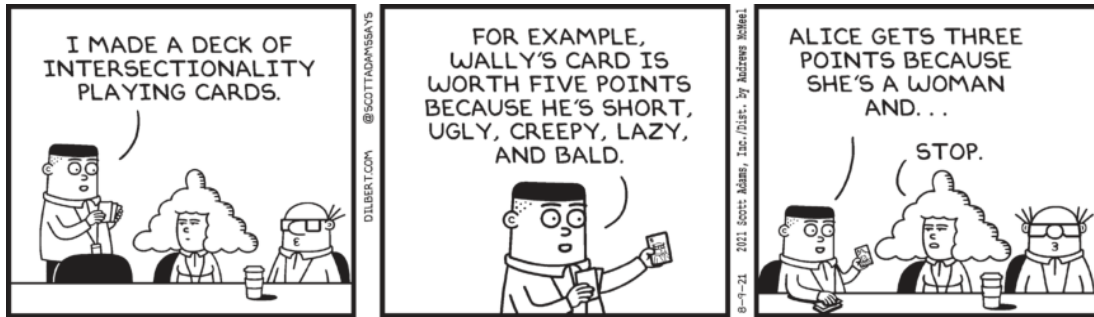
Other news

Country stars Keith Urban, Toby Keith, Carly Pearce and Jamey Johnson will perform at the Academy of Country Music Honors, which will honor Loretta Lynn, Dan + Shay and Luke Combs, among others. The annual show, which takes place this year on Aug. 25 in Nashville, will present industry awards to artists, songwriters, producers and musicians for their special contributions to country music.

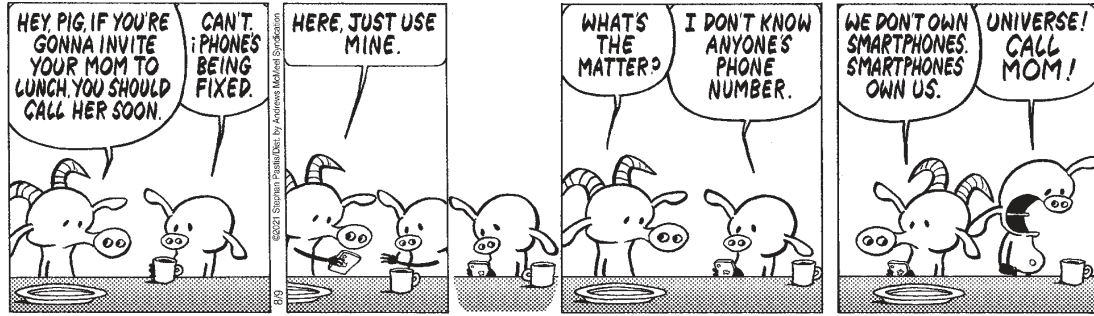
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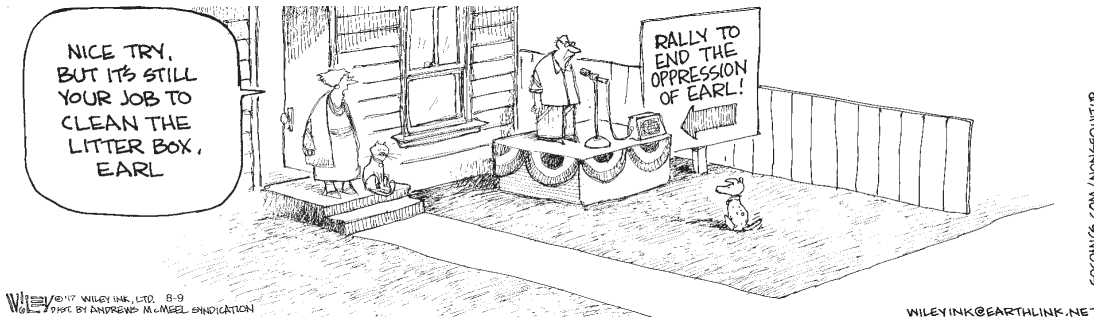
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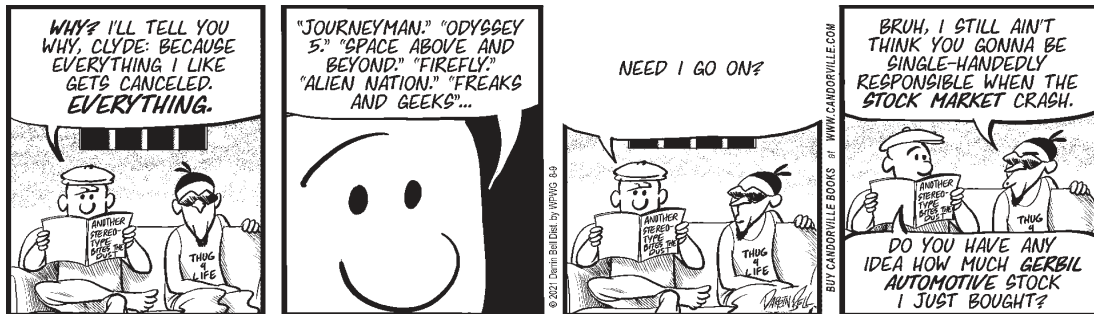
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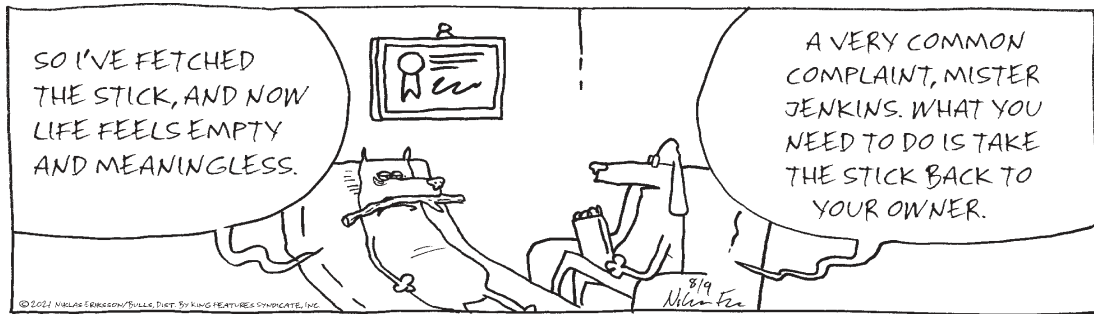
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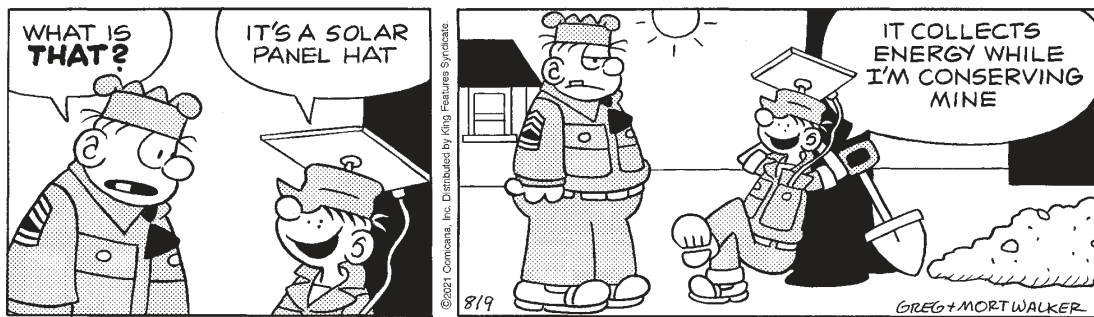
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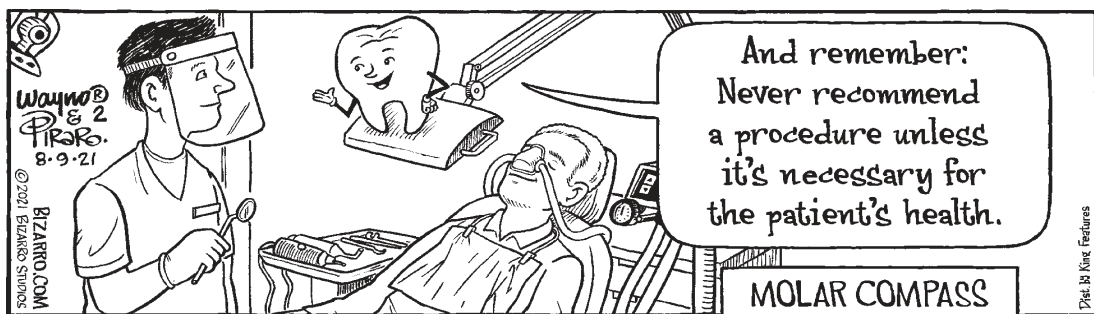
Carpe Diem



Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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ACROSS

- 1 Milky gem
- 5 Search for gold
- 8 — -Aid
- 12 Jessica of "Dark Angel"
- 13 Lennon's lady
- 14 "Mamma Mia" group
- 15 60 minutes
- 16 Camps in the wilderness
- 18 Increase
- 20 Pasta toppings
- 21 Adams and Schumer
- 23 Bearded beast
- 24 "Enough already!"
- 28 Weaponry
- 31 Diner dessert
- 32 Dressed to the —
- 34 Epoch
- 35 Criminal, to cops
- 37 Hit the gas
- 39 Shriver of tennis
- 41 Author Bellow
- 42 Chef Lagasse
- 45 Pro hoopsters
- 49 Discouraging words
- 51 Mon. follower
- 52 Worldwide (Abbr.)
- 53 EMT's skill

- 54 Ireland
- 55 Relaxed
- 56 Today, in Mexico
- 57 Freshens a lawn, say

- 19 "Let's go!"
- 22 Cranial cavity
- 24 Antonym (Abbr.)
- 25 Hasten
- 26 Snakes
- 27 Group of renters
- 29 Hosp. scan
- 30 Perched
- 33 Rebuff
- 36 Not wholly
- 38 Gladdens
- 40 Central
- 42 Actress Falco
- 43 "— Lisa"
- 44 Scottish lake
- 46 Continental currency
- 47 Tara of "Sharknado"
- 48 Taxpayer IDs
- 50 Wall St. debut

DOWN

- 1 Pearl Harbor site
- 2 Fall into a chair
- 3 Border on
- 4 Rodeo rope
- 5 Cartoon sign-off speaker
- 6 Year in Madrid
- 7 Entre —
- 8 Hawaiian honcho
- 9 Hid from view
- 10 Theater award
- 11 Back muscles, for short
- 17 Joke

Answer to Previous Puzzle

M	A	R	D	I		A	G	A	S	S	I	
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8-9

CRYPTOQUIP

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 CHV GPZHEQM OPL JHRTGY
 HEGPLXHQQB RTVUPS
 XSVUQMV: YQSMB HLXVZLPGY.
Saturday's Cryptoquip: WHAT WOULD SOMEBODY CALL FOOD THAT A CREDITOR HOLDS A CLAIM ON FROM A DEBTOR? LIEN CUISINE.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: C equals W

PRO FOOTBALL HALL OF FAME

Class has something for everybody

BY BARRY WILNER

Associated Press

CANTON, Ohio — From bone-rattling tacklers Troy Polamalu, Steve Atwater and Cliff Harris to hard-charging runner Edgerrin James to the pass-catching brilliance of Isaac Bruce and Harold Carmichael, the Pro Football Hall of Fame class of 2020 has something for everyone.

Add in blocking dynamos Steve Hutchinson and Jim Covert, Steel Curtain stalwart safety Donnie Shell and such leaders as former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue and coaches Bill Cowher and Jimmy Johnson.

They all entered the hall Saturday night, a year late due to the COVID-19 pandemic, yet just as rewarding.

“If you told me after I graduated from the University of Michigan that I’d be excited standing in Ohio in the middle of August,” Hutchinson joked, “...to me, there’s no place better than Canton, Ohio.”

Certainly all 12 men enshrined on this night felt that way.

“I am humbled and honored to wear this gold jacket,” Atwater said before looking around at the other Hall of Famers on the stage. “What a group we have up here.”

Indeed.

Polamalu had a 12-season career filled with spectacular performances, leadership and, well, winning with the Steelers. The 16th overall draft pick in 2003 from Southern California, he played in three Super Bowls, winning two, and made the NFL’s 2000s Team of the Decade.

“I love football. It was my entire life as long as I can remember,” said Polamalu, who missed festiv-

ities earlier this week after testing positive for COVID-19; he was medically cleared to attend Saturday. The crowd of 18,383 cheered long and loudly for him, delaying his speech.

He then talked about the “willingness to push beyond what the brain says is possible for the body. Football challenged me mentally, physically and spiritually. I had to succeed to quench this desire.”

Atwater, who won two Super Bowls with Denver, might have been the most physical defensive back of his era, just as the Cowboys’ Harris and Shell might have been in theirs.

Shell was a linebacker at South Carolina State who went undrafted, was shifted to safety in Pittsburgh and became a tackling machine. With veterans on strike in his rookie year of 1974, Shell made such an impression that coach Chuck Noll inserted him as a starting safety. He spent 14 seasons as a fixture for the Steelers.

With hundreds of Terrible Towels waving, Shell recognized Steeler Nation and then said of being an undrafted free agent from South Carolina State, “When facts get in the way of your goal, you must go against the grain to achieve your goal.”

It was a big night for Pittsburgh as Shell, Polamalu and Cowher were enshrined as Steelers, and Covert went to Pitt, where he blocked for Dan Marino.

“What a weekend for the Pittsburgh Steelers,” Cowher said as Terrible Towels waved throughout the stadium. “It is unbelievable to me to go in the Hall of Fame with two guys you drafted: Troy Polamalu and Alan Faneca. Also with Donnie Shell and the late,



DAVID RICHARD/AP

Harold Carmichael, a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame Centennial Class, speaks during the induction ceremony at the Pro Football Hall of Fame, Saturday in Canton, Ohio.

great Bill Nunn.”

Cowher also paid tribute to “the only head coach I ever worked for,” the late Marty Schottenheimer, predicting “one day you will be in the Hall of Fame.”

Hutchinson was a five-time All-Pro and member of the NFL 2000s All-Decade Team. Along with strong work as a pass protector, he opened holes for rushers who averaged just under 1,400 yards and 14 touchdowns a season.

After joking about potentially being uncomfortable in Hall of Fame Stadium, Hutchinson then told his son not to “fear failure but fear to have not given my all.”

Tagliabue often was passed over for the hall, but his resume as a commissioner is impressive. He was faced with such obstacles as the outbreak of the Gulf War to 9/11 to Hurricane Katrina during his stewardship from 1989-2006. His skills at overcoming those tests, keeping labor peace, guiding the NFL through expansion, significantly increasing revenues and helping pass the Rooney Rule have led to his induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame as part of the centennial class.

“This is like a dream come true,” Tagliabue said. “The centennial class spans pro football history.”

Carmichael dominated defensive backs with his 6-foot-8, 225-pound size and great hands. The Eagles star from 1971-83 had three 1,000-yard seasons in an era when the passing game was not as prominent as it is today. He averaged a touchdown every 7½ catches and made the NFL 1970s All-Decade Team. Carmichael was the

league’s Man of the Year in 1980.

“Whew, Baby,” Carmichael said when his bust was revealed. “I am so, so honored to be a part of this brotherhood, this fraternity, with love. What a journey.”

Bruce recognized his 14 siblings during his speech.

“Coming from the heart tonight,” Bruce said. He then spoke of “the defensive backs that baptized me — and the ones I baptized.”

James had the best line of the

night. After opening his gold jacket to note he was “inmate No. 336 in the Hall of Fame,” the man Peyton Manning called “the best teammate I ever played with” concluded with: “My career started with gold teeth and ended with this gold jacket.”

Manning will be enshrined Sunday night along with the other members of the Class of 2021: Charles Woodson, Calvin Johnson, Faneca, John Lynch, Tom Flores, Drew Pearson and Nunn.



MATT FREED, PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE / AP

Former Steelers safety Troy Polamalu, left, congratulates former Steelers coach Bill Cowher after Cowher's enshrinement speech.

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OLYMPICS



NATHANIEL GARCIA/U.S. Army

First Lt. Amber English won gold in women's shotgun skeet during the Tokyo Olympics, the only active-duty service member to win gold at the 2020 Olympics.

Active-duty military athletes saw high and lows in Tokyo

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — A skeet-shooting gold medalist, a steeplechase finalist and a record-setting swimmer were among the U.S. military's best-performing athletes at a pandemic-delayed Olympics held without spectators amid a surge of coronavirus infections.

The games of the XXXII Olympiad closed Sunday evening much like they opened on July 23 with scaled-back pageantry and ceremony inside a mostly empty National Stadium in Japan's capital city.

Many athletes had already returned to their home countries because of strict rules aimed at reducing the virus' spread. Tokyo's daily case numbers reached a pandemic high of 5,042 during the games' second week, up from 1,359 when they started.

But that didn't keep more than a dozen U.S. service member athletes, along with three soldier-coaches, from competing in events ranging from track and field to shooting, boxing, wrestling, sailing, taekwondo and modern pentathlon.

First, Lt. Amber English — one of six soldiers taking part in shooting events at Camp Asaka north of Tokyo — won gold in women's shotgun skeet on July 26. English, a logistics officer and member of the Army Marksmanship Unit, bested Diana Bacosi of Italy, the 2016 women's skeet gold medalist.

English, 31, a native of Colorado Springs, Colo., hit 56 of 60 targets at the event, just three off the world record held by Wei Meng of China,

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Seventeen soldiers, one Marine and one Coast Guardsman earned spots to compete in the 2020 Summer Olympics.

SOURCE: www.defense.gov

who took bronze.

"All I could control was just my own shooting and my own emotions," she told reporters after the win.

English's gold medal was one of 39 won by the United States, along with 41 silver and 33 bronze.

Sgt. Amro Elgeziry, 33, missed out on a medal in modern pentathlon but set an Olympic record 1:52.96 in the men's 200-meter swim component of Saturday's event.

It was Elgeziry's fourth straight Olympic Games. He competed for Egypt at the 2008, 2012 and 2016 games before coming to the U.S. and joining the Army in 2017.

During the steeplechase heats at National Stadium in Tokyo on July 30, Army Spc. Benard Keter, 29, ran a personal best 8:17.31 to reach the final. The Kenya native, who lives in Lubbock, Texas, ultimately finished in 11th place.

"It's been amazing competing for Team USA and Team Army," he told Stars and Stripes in an Aug. 4 video interview from the Olympic Village.

Army Staff Sgt. Naomi Graham, 32, became the first female active-duty service member to box in the Olympics. The ammunition specialist from Fayetteville, N.C., lost to

Zenfira Magomedalieva of the Russian Olympic Committee 4-1 in the Round of 16.

There were other U.S. military links to this year's games.

Italian sprinter Lamont Marcell Jacobs, the surprise gold medal winner in the 100 meters, was born to an Italian mother and American soldier father who met while he was stationed in Vicenza.

Restrictions aimed at minimizing the coronavirus' spread meant athletes didn't see much outside the Olympic bubble, Keter told Stars and Stripes.

"We aren't allowed to leave the village," he said. "It would have been good to visit some cool places in Japan after I finished my race."

Nearly 400 people associated with the games, including 29 athletes, tested positive for the coronavirus between July 1 and Aug. 8, according to Tokyo 2020, the Olympics organizing committee.

Among those was Army 1st Lt. Sam Kendricks, 28, a pole vaulter who tested positive a day before track and field events began July 30. Kendricks, who won bronze at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, was one of Team USA's leading contenders for gold in Tokyo.

Military athletes reached out to Kendricks, who serves in the 655th Transportation Company of the U.S. Army Reserve, to wish him well.

"A lot of people don't know that he is an officer in the Army," Keter said. "On the track and field team, it was he and I. After he was out, I was stepping up to still represent the Army at the Olympics."

MEN'S BOXING

Silver lining: US finalists finish just short of gold

BY GREG BEACHAM
Associated Press

TOKYO — Richard Torrez Jr. stared up at 6-foot-7 Bakhodir Jalolov and didn't blink, courageously holding his own and staying on his feet against the most intimidating fighter in Tokyo.

Keyshawn Davis and Andy Cruz traded shots for three thrilling rounds, showing off some of the most polished boxing skills in the entire Olympics.

The final two Americans in the Tokyo field got agonizingly close to ending their team's 17-year men's gold medal drought Sunday, only to fall short against two of the best boxers who stepped into the Kokugikan Arena.

Torrez and Davis still leave Japan believing they've started a new era for the once-dominant U.S. team with its best Olympic showing in decades.

"We came in here and did some things that a lot of people probably thought we weren't going to do," super heavyweight Torrez said after his 5-0 loss to Jalolov in the final bout of the tournament.

"We're putting boxing back into the USA," he added. "We're giving it a surge again. I can't be more proud of my teammates. I do think we came out here and we fueled the amateur scene in the U.S."

The team coached by Billy Walsh is leaving Tokyo with four medals — the most won by the U.S. since 2000. They also reached three gold medal bouts, more than any team since 1988.

Although they finished with three silvers, it was impossible to fault the efforts of Davis, Torrez and featherweight Duke Ragan against three



THEMBA HADEBE/AP

Uzbekistan's Bakhodir Jalolov, top, exchanges punches with Richard Torrez Jr., from the United States in a super heavyweight bout won by Jalolov.

elite opponents. International amateur success is a process that takes years, and Walsh's teams rarely get more than a few tournaments together before their top talents turn pro and it all starts over again.

Tyrell Biggs and Riddick Bowe are the only other Americans to win medals at super heavyweight, and Torrez was a striking figure in the division because of his size. Although he is hardly small at 6-foot-2, Torrez was the tiniest boxer in the super heavyweight field, and he fights in a cagey crouch that makes him look even smaller against giants like Jalolov.

Davis lost 4-1 in a close bout with Cruz, who claimed Cuba's fourth gold medal in Tokyo. The 3-0 professional who repeatedly said the Olympics would be "easy work" acknowledged he was only trying to motivate himself to gold.

Davis almost got there after sweeping the second round on all five scorecards. Cruz then swept the third and claimed gold.



THEMBA HADEBE/AP

US boxer Keyshawn Davis, left, takes a shot from Cuba's Andy Cruz during their lightweight gold medal match Sunday.

OLYMPICS



DAVID GOLDMAN/AP

Volunteers stand as IOC President Thomas Bach gives a speech during the closing ceremony in the Olympic Stadium at the 2020 Summer Olympics, Sunday, in Tokyo.

Erratic pandemic games come to a nuanced end

By TED ANTHONY
Associated Press

TOKYO — It began with a virus and a yearlong pause. It ended with a typhoon blowing through and, still, a virus. In between: just about everything.

The Tokyo Olympics, christened with “2020” but held in mid-2021 after being interrupted for a year by the coronavirus, glided to their conclusion in a COVID-emptied stadium Sunday night as an often surreal mixed bag for Japan and for the world.

A rollicking closing ceremony with the theme “Worlds We Share” — an optimistic but ironic notion at this human moment — featured everything from stunt bikes to intricate light shows as it tried to convey a “celebratory and liberating atmosphere” for athletes after a tense two weeks. It pivoted to a live feed from Paris, host of the 2024 Summer Games. And with that, the strangest Olympic Games on record closed their books for good.

Held in the middle of a resurging pandemic, rejected by many Japanese and plagued by months of administrative problems, these Games presented logistical and medical obstacles like no other, offered up serious conversations about mental health — and, when it came to sport, delivered both triumphs and a few surprising shortfalls.

From the outset, expectations were middling at best, apocalyptic at worst. Even Thomas Bach, president of the International Olympic Committee, said he’d worried that these could “become the Olympic Games without a soul.” But, he said, “what we have seen here is totally different.”

“You were faster, you went higher, you were stronger because we all stood together — in solidarity,” Bach told gathered Olympians as he closed the Games. “This was even more remarkable given the many challenges you had to face because of the pandemic. In these difficult times, you give the world the most precious of gifts: hope.”

“For the first time since the pandemic began,” he said, “the entire world came to-

“You were faster, you went higher, you were stronger because we all stood together — in solidarity,”

Thomas Bach

IOC president, to Olympians on Sunday

gether.”

He overstated it a bit. At these Games, even the word “together” was fraught. Spectators were kept at bay. A patchwork of rules kept athletes masked and apart for much of medal ceremonies, yet saw them swapping bodily fluids in some venues. That was less about being remiss than about being real: Risks that could be mitigated were, but at the same time events had to go on.

Athletes’ perseverance became a central story. Mental health claimed bandwidth as never before, and athletes revealed their stories and struggles in vulnerable, sometimes excruciating fashion.

Japan’s fourth Olympics, held 57 years after the 1964 Games reintroduced the country after its World War II defeat, represented a planet trying to come together at a moment in history when disease and circumstance and politics had splintered it apart.

The closing ceremony Sunday reflected that — and, at times, nudged the proceedings toward a sci-fi flavor. As athletes stood in the arena for the final pomp, digital scoreboards at either end of the stadium featured what organizers called a “fan video matrix,” a Zoom call-like screen of videos uploaded by spectators showing themselves cheering at home.

While Tokyo is handing off the Summer Games baton to Paris for 2024, the delay has effectively crammed two Olympics together. The next Winter Games convenes in just six months in another major Asian metropolis — Beijing, Japan’s rival in East Asia.

Perseverance: Expectations at times were hard to handle

FROM PAGE 24

were not for sale, not even to the \$15.5 billion behemoth that underwrites many of their grandest dreams.

Those voices were notably reflected in the words of Simone Biles, who, early on, reset the conversation when she pulled out of the gymnastics meet, declaring her well-being was more important than medals.

“It was something that was so out of my control. At end of the day, my mental and physical health is better than any medal,” said Biles, who benched herself while battling “the twisties.”

And by Naomi Osaka, the tennis player who lit the cauldron on Day 1, but only after spending the summer insisting that the world listen to her — really listen — instead of only watching her on the court. The planet’s highest-paid female athlete and the host country’s poster girl, she faced expectations that were hard to handle.

“I definitely feel like there was a lot of pressure for this,” said Osaka.

Hundreds of athletes found some way to use their voices in ways they hadn’t considered until the Tokyo Games — and the seismic 18 months that led up to it — all but commanded it.

They learned to talk about what it felt like to make sacrifices and accommodations for four years, then five, to come to the Games without friends and family, to put themselves out there, and to know they will be judged not on who they are but on how fast they run, how well they shoot, or whether they stick the landing.

“I’ve been afraid that my worth is tied to whether or not I win or lose,” Allyson Felix wrote the morning before her bronze-medal run in the 400 meters made her the most decorated female track athlete in Olympic history. “But right now I’ve decided to leave that fear behind. To understand that I am enough.”

They came in all shapes and sizes. A transgender weightlifter, a nonbinary skateboarder, and Quinn, the first openly transgender Olympian to win a gold medal. Teenage skateboarders, and surfers seeking gnarly waves — most of whom never dreamed of being on the Olympic stage, hugging and sharing tips and reminding us all that this is supposed to be fun.

They wove tales about sportsmanship: the high jumpers headed for a tension-filled tiebreaker for first, who stepped back and told a track official they should both win a gold.

And about advocacy: soccer players looking at a midday gold-medal game in the searing heat of the Olympic Stadium and deciding they deserved better.

The world’s top tennis players demanding their matches be rescheduled, a request that went unheeded until Paula Badosa left the court in a wheelchair with heatstroke and Daniil Medvedev told the chair umpire, “I can finish the match but I can die. If I die, are you going to be responsible?”

And about mental health: During a teary post-race interview, sprinter Noah Lyles conceded he came as much to run as to spread the gospel that became the slogan of these fraught Games held during fraught times: It’s OK not to be OK.

And about gender equity and inclusion: The International Olympic Committee add-



SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

The American flag is carried into new National Stadium during the closing ceremony for the Tokyo Olympics, Sunday.

ed five new sports and 18 new events for Tokyo to create an equal number of women and men for every sport, excluding baseball and softball. But when Britain’s first female Black swimmer was denied use of a cap that fit her afro, the conversation on a lack of diversity in the pool became louder.

“I just want people to know that no matter your race or background, if you don’t know how to swim, get in and learn to swim,” Alice Dearing, co-founder of the Black Swimming Association, said after the women’s open water marathon. “Don’t let anyone tell you it’s not for you.”

IOC president Thomas Bach said two days before the close that the Tokyo Games “far exceeded my personal expectations,” because when spectators were barred as a pandemic precaution he feared “these Olympic Games could become an Olympic Games without soul.”

Instead, Bach said, he found the intimacy in the empty venues made for an intense atmosphere. “In many cases you did not realize that there were no spectators,” he said. “Maybe in some cases you could even experience the feelings of the athletes closer and better than being surrounded by so many spectators.”

It is Bach’s job to call the Olympics a success. Maybe, though, that goal was met in Tokyo just by reaching the finish line.

The pandemic still rages, and the Beijing Winter Games are set to open a mere six months from now.

The Games, of course, will go on. They always do, except during World Wars. Japan handed the Summer Olympics flag to France on Sunday for the 2024 Paris Games. Tokyo organizers closed with a “Worlds We Share”-themed ceremony designed to make athletes and viewers “think about what the future holds” and “expresses the idea that each of us inhabits their own world.”

The athletes did that already in Tokyo, where the Olympics will be forever remembered as the Games that persevered.

OLYMPICS



ERIC GAY/AP

United States' Sue Bird, right, and teammate Diana Taurasi celebrate after their 90-75 win over Japan in the women's basketball gold medal game on Sunday in Saitama, Japan. It was the fifth gold medal victory for the two veteran players.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

US rolls to hoops gold in Bird's last Olympics

By DOUG FEINBERG
Associated Press

SAITAMA, Japan — Sue Bird and Diana Taurasi walked off the basketball court together, arm-in-arm, one last time at the Tokyo Games.

They started their journey together five Olympics ago and ended it in the same fashion as always — with gold medals hanging around their necks.

“All of what we've done for USA Basketball, we've done together. It's fitting,” Bird said after the 90-75 win over Japan on Sunday.

And now it's over — at least for the 40-year-old Bird.

“The best comparison is college since you know it's the end,” Bird said. “Now I always have a wonderful feeling and a great taste in my mouth my senior year. That's how it is with USA Basketball.”

All she and Taurasi have done on the international stage is win and now the pair stands alone with five gold medals — the first basketball players ever to accomplish that feat.

“It's 20 years and people only get to see these moments,” Taurasi said. “We're on these trips every day together. every conversation. this means a lot to us.”

While Bird is retiring from international basketball, Taurasi left the door open after the game in her on-court interview that she'll play in Paris in 2024.

5

Gold medals won in women's basketball by Sue Bird, 40, and Diana Taurasi. The U.S. women's Olympic team has seven consecutive gold medals in basketball.

SOURCE: Associated Press

She isn't actually certain she'll play, saying: “We'll see.”

Bird threw a quick jab at her 39-year-old friend for even considering it.

“Hahaha, idiot,” Bird said laughing while standing next to Taurasi.

The U.S. has now won the last seven Olympic gold medals matching the country's men's program for the most ever in a row. The men did it from 1936-68.

With Bird orchestrating the flow of games and Taurasi's scoring, they have been a constant force for the U.S., providing stability for the women's program since the 2004 Athens Games. They have won all 38 of the games at the Olympics they've competed in.

The names have changed around the pair, including greats Lisa Leslie, Sheryl Swoopes, Tina Thompson, Tamika Catchings and Sylvia Fowles, but the results haven't.

The Americans are on a 55-game Olympic winning streak dating back to the bronze medal game of the 1992 Barcelona Games.

The U.S. let Japan know that

wasn't going to change on Sunday.

The Americans jumped out to a 18-5 lead behind a dominant first quarter by Brittney Griner. The team lead 23-14 after one as Griner had 10 points, taking advantage of the undersized Japanese team. Japan was able to get within six in the second quarter before the Americans went up 11 at the half and never looked back.

As the final buzzer sounded, Bird and Taurasi embraced and then proceeded to hug all of their teammates and the coaching staff.

Griner finished with 30 points, making 14 of her 18 shots. It was the most points ever by a U.S. player in a gold medal game, surpassing the 29 by Leslie in 1996.

While Bird has said she is moving on, the future is bright for the U.S. behind Griner, Breanna Stewart and the six newcomers on this year's team. That included A'ja Wilson, who will be counted on to keep the streak going three years from now at the 2024 Paris Games. Wilson, who celebrated her 25th birthday on Sunday, made her presence felt in her Olympic debut, scoring 19 points in the gold medal game.

The victory also made Dawn Staley, the first Black women's basketball coach for the U.S., the second woman to win a gold medal as a player, assistant and head coach joining Anne Donovan. Staley said after the game that she won't come back to coach in Paris.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

US women down Brazil for 1st gold

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

TOKYO — Jordan Larson fell to the floor, put her head in her hands and cried after Brazil couldn't return her spike on match point.

The frustration of being so close but not quite good enough was replaced by a feeling of relief after the U.S. women's volleyball team finally claimed Olympic gold with a 25-21, 25-20, 25-14 victory over Brazil on Sunday.

“I'm just still in a state of shock,” Larson said. “I cried more in the last 24 hours than I think I have in my career. I'm not an emotional player, an emotional person. But I think just the emotions got the best of me. I'm now in kind of this euphoria, a state of shock.”

The United States, which had won three silver medals and two bronze since first getting on the medal stand in 1984, got to the top step by beating the team that denied it a chance at gold in the final match of the 2008 and 2012 Olympics.

Larson, who was part of that silver-winning team in 2012 and the bronze medal team five years ago, paved the way with her leadership on the court and her strong play on the attack and on defense.

Larson and middle blocker Folu Akinradewo Gunderson, who both came back for a third Olympics after falling short in Rio de Janeiro, now have a complete medal collection following what is expected to be the final Olympic match of their careers.

“I couldn't write a better story for her,” setter Jordy Poulter said about Larson delivering the winning point. “Her and Fouke have put so much time into this program and been through thick and thin. To be on this journey with them has been incredible.”

The victory also allowed U.S. coach Karch Kiraly to join Lang Ping of China as the second person to win gold as a volleyball player and then lead a country to gold as coach. Kiraly won gold indoor as a player in 1984 and 1988. He also won gold in beach volleyball in 1996.

But he said this was more gratifying because of how tough a process it has been since he joined the staff as an assistant before the 2012 Olympics and took over as head coach before 2016.

“The goal here was not to help Karch win a fourth gold medal. The goal was to help the USA women become Olympic champions,” he said. “It was more powerful in some ways for me today than when I was a player, because the first Olympics I played in, we won. We didn't come close and lose, come close and lose, come close and fall short. It makes it taste and feel much more special when you go through the hard times.”

The U.S. got off to a fast start by scoring the first four points behind strong attacking by Michelle Bartsch-Hackley. It never trailed in the opener, winning it 25-21 on a soft shot by Bartsch-Hackley that gave her eight points in the set.

That pattern continued the next two sets as the U.S. ended up winning all nine sets in the knockout round.

The match then ended in fitting style with a kill by Larson, leading to the tearful hug among the players on the court.

“A lot of people had to sacrifice a lot for us to be here and had to learn along the way,” Larson said. “We had to learn that in London and in Rio that we just weren't enough at that point. Did we believe it in that moment? Absolutely. We had to go one extra step to figure it out.”



FRANK AUGSTEIN/AP

Players from the United States react after defeating Brazil 25-21, 25-20, 25-14 on Sunday to win the gold medal in women's volleyball.

SPORTS



Ground and pound

Gane finishes off Lewis in 3rd round for interim heavyweight title » **UFC, Page 20**

OLYMPICS



The Perseverance Games

Surreal 2020 Tokyo Olympics finally reach their end

BY JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

The cauldron will be snuffed Sunday on the exhausting, enlightening, sometimes enraging 2020 Tokyo Olympics — held, actually, in 2021. These are the Games that were to be tolerated, not celebrated.

They will be both.

Imperfect but not impossible, these Olympics — willed into existence despite a pandemic that sparked worldwide skepticism and hard-wired opposition from Japan's own citizens — just might go down as the Games that changed sports for good.

These became the Olympics where the athletes had their say. The Olympics where mental health became as important as physical. The Olympics where tales of perseverance — spoken, documented and discussed loudly and at length — often overshadowed actual performance.

113

Total medals won by the United States at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. For the third straight summer Games, Team USA won more gold medals — and more medals overall — than any other country, finishing with 39 gold, 41 silver and 33 bronze medals across 28 different sports. China and Japan were closest to matching the American gold-medal haul with 38 and 27 golds, respectively. In the total count, China finished second with 88, followed by the Russian Olympic Committee's 71.

SOURCE: Associated Press

It wasn't only those who stood on the medals stand at the hyper-scrutinized pressure cooker in Tokyo, where spit tests for COVID-19 and sleeping on cardboard-framed beds were part of the daily routine. It was all of them.

Their voices were heard, in big ways and small, through hundreds of reminders that their mental and physical health

SEE PERSEVERANCE ON PAGE 22

“I’ve been afraid that my worth is tied to whether or not I win or lose. But right now I’ve decided to leave that fear behind. To understand that I am enough.”

Allyson Felix

United States 11-time Olympic medal winner

Top: Paul Chelimo, who served as a water treatment specialist in the United States Army, lies on the track after his bronze-medal finish in the final of the men's 5,000 meters at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo on Friday. Left: The United States' Allyson Felix smiles after taking bronze on Friday in the women's 400 meters final, making her the most decorated female track athlete in Olympic history.

PHOTOS BY PETR DAVID JOSEK, TOP, AND FRANCISCO SECO, LEFT/AP

2020 class more than memorable » Pro Football Hall of Fame, Page 19

