

Explosion toll may reach 300

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Thousands of people whose homes were wiped out in a fiery gas explosion searched for missing relatives Tuesday in hospitals and morgues. The Red

Cross said 297 people were known dead and at least 500 were seriously injured.

About 20 square blocks in Tlalnepantla, a poor neighborhood on the northern edge of the capital, were flattened Monday morning by a dozen explosions at a gas storage complex run by Unigas Co. and Pemex, the government

petroleum monopoly. Fireballs shot from the tanks of liquified petroleum gas and fiery debris fell on the surrounding homes, incinerating many.

"The official figure we have is 297 (dead) and we understand that eight (other) people died in hospitals during the night," said Commander Alejandro Barrios, a Red Cross duty officer in Mexico City.

Some houses nearest the explosion simply vanished, and the walls and roofs of others disappeared. The streets were littered with dead animals and blackened cars.

Officials said more than 100,000 people were evacuated from the area.

Outside one makeshift morgue survivors were lined up, and allowed to go in one at a time to identify victims. "They should have left the bodies in the homes, because there it would have been easier for us to find them," she told reporters.

Several people fainted as they waited under the hot sun.

Many of the survivors made the rounds at hospitals looking for relatives and loved ones.

At the Social Security Institute's Medical Center, families waited for news of victims.

Survivors were housed in refugee centers, such as the 18 de Marzo Sports Center, where 1,200 people spent the night. Tons of food and clothing poured in from throughout Mexico.

The army patrolled the blast area and arrested 20 looters who were trying to take advantage of the chaos. Soldiers refused to allow evacuees to return to their homes, or where their homes once stood, while the search for bodies continued.

In many cases, workers used jackhammers to break through piles of concrete rubble under which they expected to find more bodies.

Pemex spokesperson Salvador Del Rio said Monday that preliminary reports indicated a gas truck exploded, touching off subsequent blasts at Unigas Co. holding tanks and then at the adjoining Pemex center.

Pemex said its site was for storage and distribution of li-

quid petroleum gas, which is distributed mainly for cooking and heating in homes, offices and small factories.

Firefighters were able to bring the blaze under control after more than seven hours Monday. On Tuesday there was only a flame from one of the tankers that was being allowed to burn itself out. Officials said there was no danger of additional explosions.

Texas Aggies tell turkey tales

COLLEGE STATION, Texas (AP) — The typical turkey gracing the nation's tables this Thanksgiving will be a hen that ate 50 pounds of feed during a life of 17 weeks. It also is one of the dumbest, most inept critters that ever lived, say experts at Texas A&M University.

David Mellor, a poultry expert at the school, said the domesticated turkey is a bloated wimp compared to his wild cousin, flocks of which still roam the South and Southwest and are wily and swift enough to challenge hunters.

The female matures in 17 weeks and typically weighs 12 to 20 pounds. Males, which end up weighing as much as 60 pounds, are too large a meal for most families, so they usually end up as processed meat.

Mellor said American Indians had domesticated the turkey long before the Pilgrims arrived or even before Columbus made his American landfall in 1492. Spanish explorers carried the bird from Mexico to Spain in 1498. The bird spread throughout Europe and reached England in 1524.

Europeans may have called the bird "turkey" because they "may have been confused about the bird's origin, thinking that it, like the guinea-fowl or peacock, came from Turkey," said Mellor.

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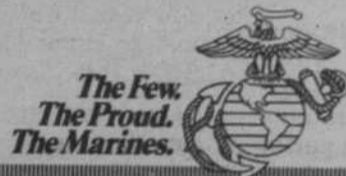
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