

# Ground attack date not yet set

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia (AP) — The U.S. military said Sunday that no date has been set for an allied ground offensive in the Persian Gulf War, and Washington said it would reject any Soviet peace plan calling for a cease-fire.

In Saudi Arabia, American and Iraqi patrols clashed along the border in seven separate engagements early Sunday.

During one pre-dawn skirmish, an American Apache fire helicopter firing Hellfire missiles destroyed two American military vehicles, killing two soldiers and wounding six, the U.S. Command said.

It was the worst friendly fire accident since Jan. 29, when a U.S. warplane hit a Marine reconnaissance vehicle during a furious tank battle along the Saudi-Kuwait border and seven American soldiers were killed.

The French Foreign Minister, Roland Dumas, said Sunday the allies have already set a

date for the ground assault. "We are on the eve or the pre-eve of the ground offensive for the liberation of Kuwait," Dumas said in a radio interview in Paris, without saying exactly when the attack would occur.

In another report, The Los Angeles Times said Sunday that the United States plans to launch a ground and sea attack this week if Iraq does not surrender or agree to a "diplomatic deal" in the next three days. The newspaper quoted unidentified U.S. military officers in Washington.

The report also quoted a senior officer as saying the allies' monthlong air war has cut the combat effectiveness of Saddam's army virtually in half. U.S. officials have said in the past that 50 percent destruction was their goal before sending ground forces into Kuwait.

When reporters at the U.S. military briefing in Riyadh asked about Dumas' comment,

Marine Brig. Gen. Richard Neal said it was false.

"No, there is no date set at this time," he said.

U.S. Secretary of State James Baker refused to say during the interview on CNN's "Newsmaker Sunday" when an allied ground assault might begin.

But when he was asked if it could start during the Aziz-Gorbachev consultations, he replied: "The campaign plan that the coalition forces have is going to be carried out in accordance with its original terms."

In two of the skirmishes Sunday, 20 Iraqi troops whose positions were overwhelmed by U.S. firepower surrendered and walked into Saudi Arabia with Apache helicopters guarding them from overhead, Neal said.

"They dropped their weapons, and that's when we just herded them back with the Apaches," he told reporters, adding that the capture was "unique."

# Ship-based planes may destroy enemy artillery

THE USS MIDWAY IN THE GULF (AP) — Warplanes used to flush Iraqis from dug-in positions during a possible ground war will face high risks from anti-aircraft fire, a visiting congressman said Sunday.

Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., who heads the House Appropriations defense subcommittee, toured the USS Midway aircraft carrier as pilots prepared for their role in a possible ground war against Iraqi forces in Kuwait.

The congressman and the pilots described a mission more dangerous than past bombing raids in the Persian Gulf War because it will require flying much closer to anti-aircraft batteries than in recent bombing raids.

Murtha said aircraft such as the F/A-18 fighter-bomber could be effective in knocking out Iraqi ground forces once they were forced out of their dug-in positions.

The ship-based airplanes would be used to knock out specific enemy artillery positions harassing American troops and to hit Iraqi supply lines as well as to continue the campaign against strategic sites in southern Iraq.

"That's the worst thing you could ever do. It's not like hitting bridges or chemical plants from high overhead. They are going to be close," said Lt. Mike Vance, 28, of Daytona Beach, Fla., an F/A-18 pilot.

Oil is especially dangerous to birds, which can drown when their feathers become oily. An even greater threat, Carreiro said, is "when they ... preen themselves and ingest large quantities of oil. That's the killer, and that's why special treatment has to be given to them."

Priority will be given to birds that have permanent nesting grounds in Bahrain, especially the local breed of cormorant.

"If they die, if nothing is done for them, these colonies will never come back," said Carreiro, who had no estimate of the local cormorant population.

MOSCOW (AP) — Iraq's foreign minister, en route to Moscow for talks with President Mikhail S. Gorbachev, said Sunday that the burden is now on the U.S.-led coalition to take steps toward peace.

"We have taken our step and now is the turn of the other side to show its good will," Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz told reporters in Iran.

He was scheduled to meet Gorbachev on Monday in a last-chance bid for peace in the Persian Gulf before a ground war. The stakes are high not only for Iraq, but for the Soviet Union as well.

The Soviet Union has played an increasingly dominant role in international efforts to bring about a diplomatic solution to the Gulf War before an all-out allied ground offensive begins.

The Soviets appear worried that the U.S. presence in the gulf could lead to long-term American superiority there, leaving the Kremlin on the sidelines.

Since Gorbachev became Soviet premier six years ago, the Kremlin has largely abandoned its policy of gaining influence in the region through weapons sales to Arab clients, including Iraq, Syria and Egypt.

# CBS working for Simon's release

NEW YORK (AP) — Getting a reporter into Baghdad is top priority for most news organizations covering the Gulf War. Not so at CBS News, where the goal is getting Simon and his three-man crew out.

"Frankly, we've made a decision that Simon's safety — and by that, I mean all four — is more important to us than whether we have somebody there," said CBS News president Eric W. Ober.

Almost immediately after Simon and the crew disappeared four weeks ago near the Kuwaiti border, the network swung into action trying to locate and rescue the four men.

Ex-CBS president Frank Stanton has used his contacts in the Red Cross to help out. CBS head Laurence Tisch sent a Telex to the pope, King Hussein of Jordan and Prince Hassan of Jordan made appeals for information based on CBS requests; Soviet officials did the same. Letters were sent and personal appeals made to diplomats around the world.

The first definitive report that Simon and company were alive came Friday, sending a wave of relief through the company. CBS said it had confirmed that the four were being held in Baghdad.

For Sam Roberts, a veteran CBS executive spearheading the network's efforts, it meant another entry into his computer bank of tips and rumors, another round of calls and letters asking for release.

"It's the toughest thing I've ever done, without any question," said Roberts, his phone ringing non-stop as he recounts the harrowing last three weeks.

Roberts, the executive director of CBS' international broadcast services, sits in his office beneath photos of the four captured journalists: Simon, London bureau chief Peter Bluff, freelance cameraman Roberto Alvarez and free-lance soundman Juan Caldera.

Joining Roberts on the front line of this story within the war are network executives Don DeCesare, who is working the Middle East, and Jack Smith, who is dealing with the embassies in London.

DeCesare, speaking by phone from Amman, Jordan, recounted his frightening return to the Kuwaiti border site where the car containing the four captured journalists was found Jan. 21.


The network's coverage of the war has been affected by the missing crew, although Ober declined to discuss specifics. He made it clear, however, that the well-being of Simon and company took precedence over war coverage.

Simon's wife, Francoise, believes her husband was captured while out doing what he's done for the past 24 years at CBS: covering one of the world's hot spots from the perspective of the front line. In the past, he's been everywhere from Biafra to Beirut for CBS News, capturing Emmys for his work in 1984 and 1986.

"For someone of his experience and integrity, there's definitely no other way to cover the war than to go and look for yourselves," said Mrs. Simon, who is conducting her own diplomatic efforts on behalf of her husband.

"I think they said, 'Let's take a ride and see what we come up with.' What the hell? That's what a good reporter does," said Roberts.

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