

Refugee crisis worsens as Serbs target border

By Mort Rosenblum
The Associated Press

KUKES, Albania — By now, a half-million tragic stories later, the ugly picture is getting steadily uglier: It is one of Serb terror and murder ripping deep Albanian roots from Kosovo soil.

As NATO pursues its relentless campaign in the air, Serbs probe the Albanian border and pepper a no man's land with mines to show they are masters on the ground.

"They are now everywhere," wailed Zade Haridinaj, among at least 2,000 refugees who crossed Wednesday from Drenica, a last redoubt of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Her group hid in the mountains for a month before riding a tractor convoy to Albania.

"The last thing we saw was Serbs beating our men to death, maybe 300 or 400 of them, including boys over 14," she said. Another 4,000 refugees, mostly

women, were following on foot, she said. Even with tractors, the trip took three days. Five children died of exposure in her cluster of tractors.

Her 84-year-old mother-in-law, Hafize Haridinaj, described how Serb paramilitary units shot to death 150 men suspected of KLA ties on March 27 in the nearby village of Izmic. Zade said her brother was among them.

Many in the group said Serbs placed their tanks and artillery near refugee convoys, apparently to discourage NATO pilots from bombing them.

On Tuesday, Naser Berisha, 36, was among nearly 4,000 refugees who straggled into the Albanian border town of Kukes. They had hidden for two weeks, hoping to return to their villages near Pristina, capital of Kosovo.

Serb snipers took pot shots at their open tractors and cars, killing a 12-year-old boy and wounding

his mother, the refugees said.

Near a military camp at Djakovica, Berisha said he watched a woman resist rape by Serbs only to be shot dead in front of her husband and children. "I dared not leave my car to try to help," he said, still visibly distraught. "What could I do?"

New details from recent arrivals dovetail with stories told repeatedly since late March when the first waves of refugees streamed out of Kosovo. More than 300,000 have come through two Albanian border posts. At least another 200,000 went to Macedonia and Montenegro.

"The routine is that armed Serbs arrive and tell everyone to put their valuables and car keys on the kitchen table and to be gone within 30 minutes," said Maureen Capps of San Diego, a Catholic Relief Services aid worker, in Kosovo since last fall.

Other foreign aid workers and

Kosovar refugees offer similar accounts.

"It has been completely orchestrated since summer, with troops, police and the paramilitary," said Keith Ursel, an American U.N. World Food Program officer.

A common pattern, he said, was for Serbs to frighten refugees away from their villages with shelling, then call in trucks by radio to empty out houses, which were then torched.

Expulsions reached a peak after the October offensive and then subsided. They resumed on a massive scale — backed by army tanks — after NATO planes attacked Serbia.

At first, Serbs targeted KLA strongholds populated by family members of ethnic Albanian fighters in the hills. Then they fanned out, emptying most towns and villages and burning many of them.

Those who resisted were persuaded with cluster bombs, mor-

tar shells and sniper fire, the refugees said. Suspected guerrillas were arrested or executed on the spot. Beatings, sometimes fatal, were common. Theft by Serb police was systematic.

Reports of rape are growing, foreign medical workers said, although shame makes victims reluctant to speak. People are killed with no evident pattern, and farm animals, dogs and cats are put to death as a matter of course.

Often Serbs drive into villages in buses or police vehicles not easily identifiable by NATO pilots.

By now, according to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, fewer than a million ethnic Albanians are left in Kosovo, and nearly half of them are displaced, hiding in forests and mountains.

No one knows how many displaced people remain in Kosovo, but 400,000 seems a reasonable estimate, said UNHCR spokesman Jacques Franquin.

Air campaign could continue into summer, officials say

By Laura Myers
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — NATO's air campaign in Yugoslavia could stretch into the summer, U.S. officials suggested Wednesday, as the first Apache attack helicopters began arriving in Albania as part of a major buildup of forces.

Clinton administration officials, in closed-door meetings with congressional officials, have signaled NATO is poised to continue the air campaign for several weeks longer, possibly into midsummer if Serb forces continue

fighting ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Army Gen. Henry Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers that while bombing has been hampered by weather, conditions usually improve in the Balkans in June and July, the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity. That would make it longer than the U.S.-led, six-week Gulf War in 1991.

"This is going to be a sustained campaign," said one lawmaker who was briefed.

In the move to bolster the NATO force, the Apaches began arriving in Albania, and the

Clinton administration was preparing within days to call up of at least several thousand military reservists and deploy 300 more warplanes to join NATO airstrikes. That would bring the total air power to 1,000 aircraft — two-thirds of them American.

Maj. Gen. Charles Wald, a strategic planner for the Joint Chiefs, called the massive buildup and intensifying air campaign against Serb forces "an indication of our resolve that we're going to see this thing through to the end."

Some 82 fresh U.S. warplanes already or-

dered to Europe also began arriving Wednesday, including 24 F-16 jet-fighters, four A-10 "tank killer" attack airplanes, 15 Marine EA-6B radar jammers to interfere with Serb air defenses and 38 refueling tankers. The Pentagon said Serbs fired dozens of surface-to-air missiles at allied planes Wednesday night in the biggest show yet of enemy anti-aircraft fire.

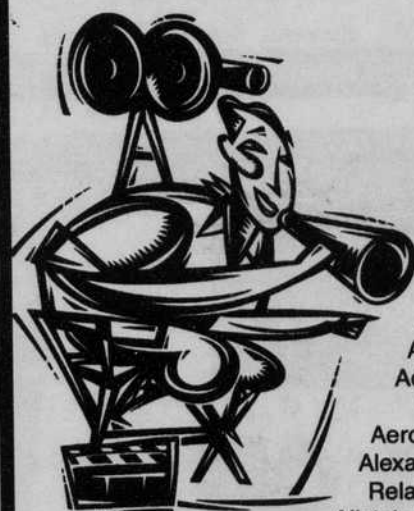
U.S. Army Gen. Wesley Clark, commander of NATO, has requested the number of Apaches be doubled to 48, U.S. defense officials said.

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