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P.O. Box 3159, Eugene OR 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co. Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon. The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices in Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union. The Emerald is private property. The unlawful removal or use of papers is prosecutable by law.

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INTERNATIONAL

Israel storms West Bank city

By Stephen Franklin
Chicago Tribune

RAMALLAH, West Bank (KRT)— Hunting house to house for suspected terrorists, Israeli troops took control of an entire Palestinian city Monday for the first time in the current 16-month intifada as Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat voiced defiance from his besieged headquarters in Ramallah.

The army said its incursion into the West Bank town of Tulkarem was to hunt for the perpetrators of a deadly shooting attack last week at a bat mitzvah in the Israeli town of Hadera. Israeli troops backed by dozens of tanks engaged in sporadic gun battles with Palestinians that continued into Tuesday morning. At least two Palestinians were killed and two dozen wounded.

The army imposed a strict curfew on Tulkarem, detained a number of suspects and raised the Israeli flag over several seized buildings.

Arafat, despite being under virtual house arrest in his Ramallah headquarters, surrounded by Israeli tanks, brushed off the Tulkarem operation and the Israeli firepower that inched closer to his door front a few days ago. Vowing to risk his own life, he said the Palestinians would survive the current "tight spot" to eventually build their state.

"They have crossed all red lines, and our people cannot stand with their eyes closed to these Israeli attempts," Arafat told a large group of writers and intellectuals, who were invited to his heavily guarded compound to show their solidarity with the besieged Palestinian leader. "The proof of this is the strong and firm steadfastness of our people in Tulkarem."

"The Palestinian state will be established with (East Jerusalem) as its capital. By God I see it coming, martyred or alive," he said.



Israeli tanks enter the West Bank town of Tulkarem on Monday.

KRT

Arafat spoke with Israeli tanks sitting within 100 feet of his headquarters, their long-range guns locked in his direction. From several blocks away came the roar of Israeli machine-gun fire and the howl of ambulances, rushing to pick up wounded Palestinian demonstrators from clashes in Ramallah. One Palestinian reportedly was killed in those clashes.

While the Israeli army has repeatedly entered Palestinian cities in recent months, sometimes staying for weeks, its raid on Tulkarem was the first time it had taken control of a whole city since Palestinian self-rule began in 1994. Israeli officials said they did not plan to stay permanently, but offered no timetable for their exit.

"This is not a reoccupation," said Lt. Gen. Shaul Mofaz, the army chief of staff. "Occupation is when you go house to house, impose military rule and ultimately stay there. We have no intention of staying forever."

After entering the city around 3 a.m. Monday, Israeli troops arrested 10 members of the militant Islamic

groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, military officials said. Israeli officials said they had notified Palestinian officials in advance about their takeover of the city.

"We mean to arrest terrorists and prevent attacks," said Israeli army spokesman Lt. Col. Oliver Rafovich. "After so many casualties, we had no choice but to clean up various areas."

The military decided to go into Tulkarem, Rafovich said, after the attack last Thursday by a Palestinian gunman at a banquet hall in the nearby Israeli city of Hadera. Seven people were killed, including the attacker, and at least 30 were wounded.

Israeli newspapers have been full of stories this week about dissent within the ranks of Palestinian leadership, and the possibility that Arafat would resign. But Palestinian officials denied the rumors Monday, saying such rumors are an effort by Israel to destabilize the Palestinian leadership.

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Injured detainees arrive in Cuba

By Carol Rosenberg
Knight Ridder Newspapers

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba (KRT) — Bullet-riddled casualties of the war in Afghanistan, 14 suspected al-Qaida and Taliban terrorists arrived on stretchers Monday at a prison compound nearing capacity to face uncertain U.S. justice and receive top-notch Navy medical care.

Four Marines in fatigues and yellow rubber gloves carried each arrival, one by one, off a huge Air Force transport plane to raise to 158 the number of captives at Camp X-Ray, a compound of eight-by-eight foot chain-link cells. The compound had 160 cells on Monday. Thirty new cells should be ready Thursday, Marine Brig. Gen. Michael Lehnert said.

The prisoners were seen by doctors on their arrivals and three will require surgery for infection shortly, Lehnert said.

All arrived in stable condition from earlier surgery by U.S. military

doctors in Kandahar, Afghanistan, to remove bullets from their arms or legs, said Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Brendan McPherson.

Reporters watched the sober unloading operation from a hilltop overlooking the runway. All wore turquoise surgical masks and orange jumpsuits topped by blue denim jackets as protection against the chill during their 8,000-mile journey from South Asia to the Caribbean aboard a C-141 Starlifter from Andrews Air Force Base in Virginia.

Two were leg amputees. One was missing a left leg, below the knee.

"They were restrained in an appropriate manner, which did not aggravate their medical conditions," said McPherson, a spokesman for the prison camp project. "A medical team was on board to provide any medical care they needed."

Commanders here have gone out of their way to characterize the captives' conditions here as humane but not comfortable, part of a balancing

act between the Geneva Conventions and strict security measures.

Still, human rights groups have protested what they characterized as sensory deprivation and inhumane treatment the security measures, which include blinding, shackling and deafening them in transit and placing them on their knees in shackles before in-prison processing.

In Los Angeles, a federal judge agreed to hear a petition from civil rights advocates, including former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, which challenge the detentions at Guantanamo.

Separately, the Netherlands demanded the United States recognize the detainees as prisoners of war with rights under the Geneva Conventions.

"In the fight against terrorism, we need to uphold our norms and values," said Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister Jozias van Aartsen. "That applies to prisoners, too."

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Steve Baggs, Peter Utsey, illustrators.
Photo: Thomas Patterson, editor. Adam Amato, Jonathan House, Adam Jones, photographers.

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