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# U.S. soldiers, Kurds killed by friendly fire

Mark McDonald and Ken Dilanian  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

IRBIL, Iraq — In the latest “friendly fire” episode of the Iraq war, American planes apparently fired by mistake on friendly Kurdish guerrillas and U.S. Special Forces soldiers on Sunday, killing at least 18 Kurdish fighters and injuring about 80 people.

Four Americans also were believed to have died in the attack. U.S. officers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bashur airfield in northern Iraq said American Special Forces soldiers were killed, but would not give details.

Also killed was a translator for the British Broadcasting Corp., Kamran Abdul Razzaq.

The U.S. Central Command said in a brief statement: “Coalition aircraft

were conducting close air support missions at the time, and were in coordination with ground forces. The circumstances contributing to the incident are under investigation.”

Wagih Barzani, the Kurdish special forces commander and the younger brother of the powerful Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani, was critically injured.

Barzani was flown by helicopter to Bashur airfield, where he was treated and evacuated to a military hospital in Germany. He was in stable but serious condition with a shrapnel injury to the brain, said Lt. Col. Harry Stinger, the commander of the 250th Forward Surgical Team.

In an interview with Knight Ridder on March 29, Barzani said his forces were at U.S. disposal in the fight to oust Saddam Hussein.

“Anything the Americans need, we are ready to provide,” he said, and promptly invited an American reporter to sit for a lunch of rice, bread and fish.

The “friendly fire” incident occurred near Dibakan, a town recently liberated by Kurdish guerrillas about 30 miles southeast of Mosul, Iraq’s

third-largest city.

A group of some 18 vehicles in the American and Kurdish convoy, including military transports and journalists’ vans, was making its way to Dibakan when the commander of the U.S. team reportedly stopped to call in an air strike. It was believed he had seen an Iraqi tank that had targeted the convoy.

BBC “World Affairs” editor John Simpson, who was in the convoy, said he saw two U.S. F-14 jets come in low over the convoy. What followed, he said, was “every type of horror.”

“I saw the bomb coming out of one of the planes, just one bomb and then extraordinarily I saw it as it came down beside me,” he said. “It was painted white and red and it crashed into the ground about 10 yards from where I was standing.”

Several of the vehicles had been carrying ammunition and rockets, which later exploded in the fires caused by the bombing. TV footage of the scene showed a dozen hulks of cars and trucks lying burned and twisted along the road.

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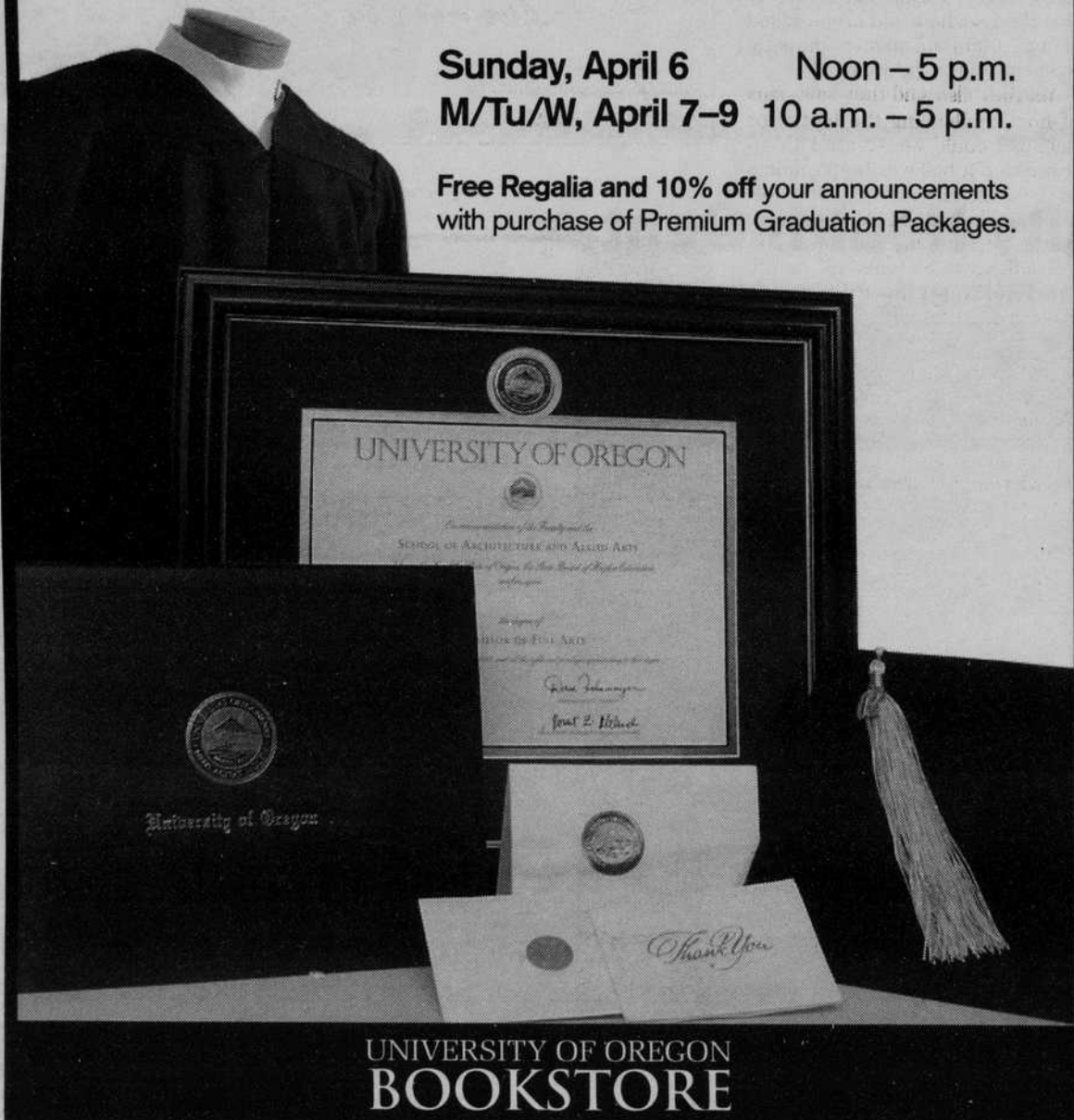
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# Soldiers fall sick; sarin suspected

Tom Lasseter  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

ALBU MUHAWISH, Iraq — U.S. soldiers evacuated an Iraqi military compound early Monday after tests by a mobile laboratory detected the presence of sarin, a powerful nerve agent.

The testing came after more than a dozen soldiers from the Army’s 101st Airborne Division who guarded the military compound on Saturday night came down with symptoms consistent with exposure to very low levels of nerve agent, including vomiting, dizziness and skin blotches.

The soldiers, along with a Knight Ridder reporter, a CNN cameraman and two Iraqi prisoners of war, were sent for decontamination and hosed down with water and bleach.

A spokesman for U.S. Central Command in Qatar said the military was investigating.

If subsequent tests uphold the findings, it would be the first evidence of weapons of mass destruction, a cornerstone of the Bush administration’s rationale for the invasion of Iraq and something that eluded United Nations inspectors for months.

Early tests for chemical agents at

the compound were inconsistent. Some showed the presence of so-called G-Series nerve agents, which include tabun and sarin, both of which Iraq has been known to possess. A hand-held scanning device also indicated the soldiers had been exposed to a nerve agent. Other tests, however, came back negative.

A senior defense official in United States said Sunday night that the military was aware of “false positive” readings, and there were “no deleterious effects” on military personnel due to nerve-agent exposure.

More precise tests by an Army Fox mobile nuclear, biological and chemical detection laboratory indicated the existence of sarin and triggered the evacuation of the captured military compound by dozens of soldiers.

Even as the tests were being done, high-ranking commanders hastened to the scene on Sunday to examine the sites. They made no comment afterward on what was contained in the sites near the village of Abu Muhawish, on the Euphrates River about 60 miles south of Baghdad.

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EMBROIDERY

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### Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. Box 3159, Eugene OR 97403  
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