

U.S. opens major ground assault in Fallujah

U.S. military launches ground offensive Monday; 10,000 to 15,000 troops line Iraqi city's borders

BY JIM KRANE
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEAR FALLUJAH, Iraq — U.S. troops backed by thunderous air and artillery barrages launched a ground offensive Monday to seize key insurgent strongholds inside Fallujah, the city that became Iraq's major sanctuary for Islamic extremists who fought Marines to a standstill last April.

Two Marines were killed when their bulldozer flipped over into the Euphrates near Fallujah, and a

military spokesman estimated 42 insurgents were killed across the city in bombardment and skirmishes before the main assault began.

Hours after starting the offensive, U.S. tanks and Humvees from the 1st Infantry Division entered the northeastern Askari neighborhood.

U.S. troops advanced slowly after dusk on the Jolan neighborhood, a warren of alleyways where Sunni militants have dug in, and by dawn Tuesday some U.S. elements were

inside the district. Artillery, tanks and warplanes pounded the district's northern edge, softening the defenses and trying to set off any bombs or boobytraps planted by the militants.

Marines were visible on rooftops in Jolan. A reporter at a U.S. camp near the city saw orange explosions lighting up the district and a fire burning on the city's edge.

Heavy firing continued into the pre-dawn hours Tuesday, and residents reached by satellite telephone reported the constant drone of warplanes overhead.

A U.S. jet fired an air-to-ground missile at a building late Monday from which U.S. and Iraqi forces had

taken fire, the U.S. command said. The building was destroyed.

U.S. troops cut off electricity to the city, and most private generators were not working. Residents said they were without running water and were worried about food shortages because most shops in the city have been closed for the past two days.

Masked insurgents roamed Fallujah streets throughout the day. One group of four fighters, two of them draped with belts of ammunition, moved through narrow passageways, firing on U.S. forces with small arms and mortars. Mosque loudspeakers blared, "God is great, God is great."

Just outside the Jolan and Askari

neighborhoods, Iraqi troops deployed with U.S. forces took over a train station.

The top U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. George Casey, predicted a "major confrontation" in the operation he said was called "al-Fajr," Arabic for "dawn." He told reporters in Washington that 10,000 to 15,000 U.S. troops along with a smaller number of Iraqi forces were encircling the city.

Overall, the main force did not appear to have moved deeply into Fallujah on Monday. Most U.S. units appeared to be lined up at the edge of their neighborhoods with some scouts and perhaps special operators venturing inside.

U.S. military trial halted due to incompetence of tribunal

Osama bin Laden's driver won't be tried unless the military commission's guidelines are changed

BY PAISLEY DODDS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba — A U.S. federal court halted proceedings ahead of the military trial of Osama bin Laden's driver Monday, saying his status as an enemy combatant had to be determined by a competent tribunal.

It was the first time a federal court has halted proceedings ahead of trials before U.S. military commissions, which had been resurrected from World War II, at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base.

A U.S. District Court judge in Washington halted the trial of Salim Ahmed Hamdan, 34, of Yemen, in a lawsuit filed by his lawyers.

"Unless and until a competent tribunal determines that petitioner is not entitled to protections afforded prisoners of war under Article 4 of the Geneva Convention ... of Aug. 12, 1949, he may not be tried by military commission for the offenses with which he is charged," U.S. District Judge James Robertson said in his ruling.

The court also ruled that unless the military commission guidelines are changed to conform to the Uniform Code of Military Justice,

Hamdan cannot be tried and must be moved from the pre-commission wing at the Camp Delta prison camp to the general population.

Four terror suspects set to go before the commissions were moved out of solitary cells recently to a pre-commission wing of Delta.

Hamdan's military-appointed defense lawyer, Lt. Cmdr. Charlie Swift, also asked the commission Monday to reinstate two members and an alternate who were dismissed after challenges to their impartiality.

Swift said he would not have challenged them in August if he knew his client would be penalized by facing a smaller three-member commission.

Hamdan's military trial was to have begun Dec. 7 at this U.S. base in eastern Cuba.

The ruling in Washington came as lawyers began pretrial motion hearings in the case of Hamdan, who is charged with conspiracy to commit war crimes, murder and terrorism.

Hamdan said he never supported terrorism, was not an al-Qaida member and only earned a pittance driving bin Laden.

"These commissions were intended for people like Osama bin

Laden, not a mechanic who drove people around," Swift said. "The fact that we're doing this will taint the reputation of military justice for years to come."

Hamdan was found to be an enemy combatant last month by a review tribunal, a classification affording fewer legal protections than prisoner of war. His lawyer was barred from representing him at the hearing.

Swift's federal lawsuit is one of more than 60 similar challenges, arguing that the commissions are illegal and should not have jurisdiction.

Since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in June cleared allowed detainees to challenge detentions in U.S. courts, civilian attorneys have poured into Guantanamo to meet with clients.

Some of the 550 prisoners from more than 40 countries have been held for nearly three years, but few have had access to attorneys and only four have been charged.

Since President Bush ordered the commissions, defense attorneys have said the rules are so vague that a fair trial is impossible. There is no specific appeal process, and lawyers are still debating what type of evidence can be used during trials.

The review tribunals were set up after the Supreme Court decision, and since then more than 300 cases have been reviewed. Only one man, a Pakistani, has been freed.

Bankrupt church's request deferred by federal judge

Roman Catholic archdiocese' request for independent trustee to handle assets may be renewed in one year

BY WILLIAM MCCALL
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PORTLAND — An unusual request to assign an independent trustee to handle the assets of the first Roman Catholic archdiocese in the nation to declare bankruptcy over priest sex abuse claims was deferred until next year, a judge ruled Monday.

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Elizabeth Perris told one of the individual creditors the request could be renewed next May or June, when the financial reorganization of the

Archdiocese of Portland is expected to start taking shape.

"Let me know if you need it back on the docket and we'll set another hearing," Perris said.

Paul DuFresne, one of the many individual creditors who have filed claims, had filed a motion seeking to create a separate account to hold archdiocese assets until a Chapter 11 reorganization plan is approved.

As DuFresne noted in his motion, the archdiocese "has estimated in

ARCHDIOCESE, page 6

Ivory Coast: French military forces claim they did not intend overthrow

Continued from page 3

that President Gbagbo is going to be overthrown," presidential spokesman Desire Tagro said.

The French denied surrounding the house or intending to oust Gbagbo, saying forces only were securing a temporary base at a hotel a few hundred yards away for about 1,300 foreigners who had taken refuge at a French military base.

"Everything should go back to normal," French mission commander Gen. Henri Poncet said on state TV, alongside Ivory Coast chief of army staff Gen. Matthias Doue. "It is absolutely not a matter of ousting President Laurent Gbagbo."

State radio and TV, however, delivered urgent calls for loyalists to gather at Gbagbo's house.

Thousands responded, chanting against the French: "The whites don't like the blacks, but we don't care!" Some signs declared, "Ivory Coast is a sovereign state."

The crowd swarmed one foreigner — by appearance an immigrant from a neighboring northern country — caught up in their midst, kicking and beating him. "Kill him," young men shouted, before he was dragged into the crowd.

Six men, faces painted black, forced an AP reporter from his taxi at gunpoint and commandeered the vehicle.

French forces fired warning shots, witnesses and protesters said. Doctors said many of those treated Monday had been trampled trying to get away, although they reported removing bullets from several wounded.

French military spokesman Col. Henry Aussavy said he knew of no one

shot by French forces. Ivory Coast security forces also have moved forcefully at times against the loyalists.

One of the injured in Abidjan's Cocody hospital, Claude Akoun, said he and three other demonstrators were shot by French soldiers near Gbagbo's residence, after they walked toward the troops, insulting them. "The soldiers opened fire. I was shot in the leg and fell," he said.

Red Cross official Kim Gordon-Bates said the casualty toll since Saturday had climbed to "over 500 wounded — much more than that." Loyalist mobs were blocking efforts to set up an emergency clinic for the injured, he said.

A standoff arose outside Abidjan, as several hundred loyalist youths stood on a main road, blocking a 70-vehicle heavily armed convoy of French reinforcements trying to enter the city.

Tensions crossed Ivory Coast's borders. U.N. officials said more than 1,000 refugees fled into neighboring Liberia. Guinea, to the north, said it was sending military reinforcements to its border.

After Saturday's airstrike on the French military post, France hit back, wiping out Ivory Coast's newly built-up air force — two Russian-made Sukhoi jet fighters and at least three helicopter gunships — on the ground.

Machete-waving mobs sought revenge against French targets. With armored vehicles and helicopter gunships deployed, France used tear gas and concussion grenades to quell the mobs.

Associated Press reporter Nafi Diouf in Dakar, Senegal, contributed to this report

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Please Note: Viewing of this movie is "recommended viewing" as preparation for the subsequent Feminist Salon (see the following listing.)

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