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IN BRIEF

U.S. military deaths in Iraq war total 1,155

As of Thursday, Nov. 11, 2004, at least 1,155 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. At least 877 died as a result of hostile action, the Defense Department said. The figures include three military civilians.

The AP count is six higher than the Defense Department's tally, which was not updated Thursday because of the Veterans Day holiday.

The British military has reported 74 deaths; Italy, 19; Poland, 13; Spain, 11; Ukraine, nine; Bulgaria, seven; Slovakia, three; Estonia, Thailand and the Netherlands, two each; and Denmark, El Salvador, Hungary and Latvia have reported one death each.

Since May 1, 2003, when President Bush declared that major combat operations in Iraq had ended, 1,017 U.S. military members have died, according to AP's count. That includes at least 778 deaths resulting from hostile action, according to the military's numbers.

Blair, Bush consult on peace in Mideast

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Prime Minister Tony Blair sought consensus with President Bush on Thursday to make peace in the Middle East an urgent priority, exploring whether the death of Yasser Arafat offers new avenues for restarting Israeli-Palestinian talks. The two leaders met over dinner at the White House in an informal start of two days of talks about the pending elections in Iraq, Iran's nuclear ambitions, trans-Atlantic relations and Mideast peace. Bush greeted Blair on the South Lawn with a hearty handshake and patted the smiling British leader on the back before ushering him inside.

- The Associated Press

Arafat's death, fears of change trouble Palestine

The nation scrambles to appoint a new leader and arrange funeral services to accommodate mourners

BY RAVI NESSMAN THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RAMALLAH, West Bank - Palestinians at home and abroad wept, waved flags and burned tires Thursday in an eruption of grief at the death of Yasser Arafat, the man they consider the father of their nation. The quick appointment of successors did little to dispel the huge question marks now hanging over Mideast peace efforts.

Although Arafat's death at 75 led some world leaders to talk about the possibility of a new era, the outlook was also shadowed by fears of a chaotic transition and a strengthening of Islamic militants.

The burial arrangements in themselves showed how disrupted the region is. The international funeral was to be held in Egypt, because few Arab leaders would travel to Israelicontrolled Palestinian land; Arafat was to be buried in the West Bank town of Ramallah because Israel refused to approve interment in Jerusalem; and most mourners from the Gaza Strip would be barred from traveling across Israeli territory to Ramallah, a security official said.

Workers in Cairo scrambled to lay new carpet and mow the lawn at a small mosque near the airport where dozens of foreign dignitaries will honor the Palestinian leader in a modest ceremony Friday morning, before Arafat's body is flown to Ramallah for a burial service.

In France, where Arafat died before dawn Thursday after 13 nights in a Paris military hospital, eight pallbearers carried his flag-draped coffin past an honor guard Thursday evening as a military band played the French and Palestinian national anthems and a Chopin funeral march.

Arafat's widow, Suha, stifled sobs as the coffin was transferred from a French military helicopter to the official French airplane heading to Egypt.

Though it had been expected for

several days as he fell into a coma, Arafat's death stunned Palestinians and left them wondering who could possibly replace their leader of the last four decades.

Arafat had not anointed a successor, but within hours the Palestine Liberation Organization elected former Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas to replace him as its new chief, virtually ensuring he takes over as Palestinian leader, at least for now.

The Palestinian legislature also swore in Speaker Rauhi Fattouh as caretaker president of the Palestinian Authority, the self-ruling power in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, though that position will likely have far less power than when Arafat held it. Fattouh is to serve for 60 days until elections can be held, though the law may be amended to allow parliament to choose the new president.

Thousands of Palestinians flooded the streets, many weeping and clutching Arafat's photo. Even members of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups, often critical of Arafat, mourned his death.

Safra Hassan gave birth to twin boys in Gaza a few hours after Arafat died and said she was naming them Yasser and Arafat. "I'm so proud that the name of Yasser Arafat will be in my house every day, just as the name of Yasser Arafat will be in every Palestinian house forever," she said.

Black smoke from burning tires rose across the Gaza Strip and gunmen fired symbolic volleys into the air. At Arafat's battered Ramallah compound where he will be buried, flags flew at halfstaff. The radio played somber music, church bells in the partly Christian city rang out, and Quranic verses were played for hours over mosque loudspeakers.

By Thursday evening, though, the mourning had given way to subdued candlelight vigils.





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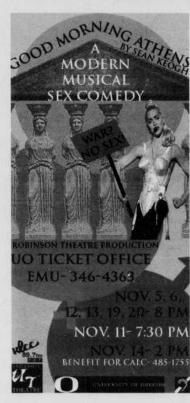
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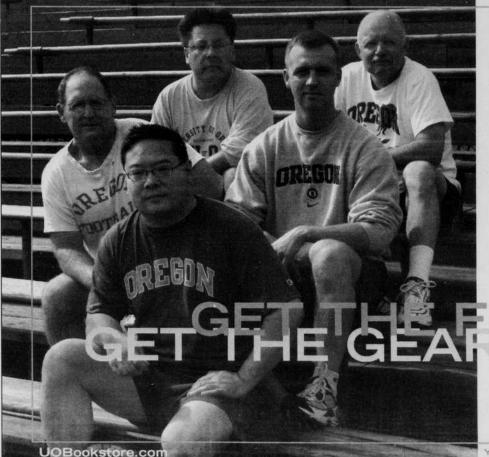
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