

Rebel Units Blast Hospital In Intense Lebanon Battle

By WILTON WYNN
BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP)—Government forces pounded rebel strongholds around Tripoli from the land and sea Sunday in the biggest battle of Lebanon's seven-week-old rebellion.

The rebels apparently were trying to capture or destroy the U.S. Presbyterian hospital, isolated in rebel territory overlooking Tripoli.

The insurgents warned earlier they would take the hospital if government guards did not withdraw.

Explosions shook the building and bullets hit its outer walls. Americans evacuated the 60-year-old hospital, known as Kennedy Memorial, two weeks ago.

At least nine persons were reported killed and many wounded in fighting swirling around Tripoli Sunday and Saturday night. Sources here feared the battle might mushroom into a rebel attempt to take all of the northern port city.

Government gunboats in the Mediterranean shelled the port area of El Mena, where the rebels threatening the hospital were holed up. Armored cars blasted their strongholds from land points.

Roads leading to the isolated hospital have been mined by rebel forces, but the hospital staff—two doctors and 40 nurses—are able to make telephone contact with the outside.

There were indications the rebels sought possession of the hospital for their own wounded. After a 12-hour battle Friday night and Saturday morning, more fighting broke out Saturday night when rebels blew up a police station, killing six guards.

Government security forces said overnight rebel casualties were heavy with at least 35 wounded. There was no indication of the number killed, they said.

Rebel sources said three persons were killed and 10 wounded as government artillery destroyed 30 houses.

Fourth Day of Fighting
This was the fourth straight day of intense fighting around Tripoli. In the first day of fighting, 12 rebels were killed and at least 25 wounded, security spokesmen said. Eight persons were killed in the fighting Saturday.

The U.S. Embassy was warned last Tuesday that the hospital would be destroyed unless government security force guards were withdrawn from the establishment.

The embassy, however, asked the Lebanese military authorities to increase the guard. Fifteen guards were sent in. The hospital staff reported by telephone that the guards were still there.

Tripoli, 40 miles north of Beirut, has been the scene of the heaviest fighting in the rebellion.

It was there that the revolt broke out 51 days ago against the pro-Western regime of President Camille Chamoun.

A security spokesman estimated there were 350 armed rebels in Tripoli itself, plus 500 more serving in unarmored capacities. But rebel forces north of the city may number thousands, the spokesman said. They are fighting a continuing guerrilla type warfare against security forces.

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