

GULF

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More freed hostages fly from Iraq, Kuwait

Nearly 500 more foreigners flew out of Iraq and occupied Kuwait on Tuesday, ending four months at swords' point following the Iraqi invasion of the oil-rich emirate.

One freed British hostage said he saw bodies on the street outside his Kuwait hideout Tuesday morning.

Three chartered flights brought 243 foreigners from Kuwait to Baghdad to join hundreds of other hostages on three chartered jetliners that left Iraq for Bangkok, London and Frankfurt.

Callum Strachan, dressed in a traditional kilt from his native Scotland, saluted the other hostages by playing his bagpipes as the foreigners cleared Iraqi passport control.

"The people who deserve the greatest admiration are the Kuwaitis who sheltered us despite the fact that they could be executed on the spot if they were found helping us," said 51-year-old Briton Ken Emsden.

He said there still was gunfire every night in Kuwait and that he saw the bodies of four civilians in the street Tuesday morning.

"We're just happy it's finally over," said Sid Hatcher, 35, of Knoxville, Tenn., who was held at an industrial site in Iraq.

Diplomats said just 14 Americans were on the flights from Baghdad. There were no Americans on the flights from Kuwait to Baghdad.

"We must have gotten them all," said one American consular official, referring to earlier evacuation flights from the Persian Gulf emirate. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

In Washington, the Bush administration said a planned evacuation flight Thursday is "likely to be the last" for Americans and will probably also carry home the remaining staff of the U.S. Embassy in Kuwait.

"We would anticipate that once all Americans who want out have been able to get out that we would remove the entire staff of the embassy," said White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater.

The plane bound for Frankfurt on Tuesday carried 16 freed hostages. The flight to London carried 310 people, nearly all of them Britons.

A Japanese-chartered jetliner left Baghdad for Bangkok with 159 people aboard, including 14 Japanese diplomats from Kuwait. Nearly all the others were former Japanese hostages.

Diplomats said about 400 Americans were expected to remain in Iraq and Kuwait, mainly people with dual U.S.-Iraqi citizenship or American spouses of Iraqis.

Mass starvation causes new trouble throughout war-torn Liberian cities

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) - Four-year-old Falah Saah, too weak from starvation to cry out, could only murmur listlessly as he lay in his mother's lap.

"I want drink, drink, drink," he said softly, nearly drowned out by the moans from other sick children in the ward at Island Hospital, one of only two hospitals still operating in Monrovia, the capital of war-wrecked Liberia.

His mother, Maita Solui, said he is one of only three of her seven children to survive the West African country's year-long civil war.

Hundreds of children have died of starvation, and doctors say that unless a huge food aid program is launched, thousands more will succumb.

Other youngsters, brutalized by seeing mothers raped and fathers, brothers and sisters killed, became child soldiers in the rebel armies. Falah's eldest brother joined up and was killed.

The physical and mental condition of the surviving children has raised fears about the future generation of this West African nation. Relief workers say the degree of starvation has been so great that many children who live will suffer brain damage.

The child soldiers suffer in other ways. At the rebel base in Caldwell, outside the capital, a young boy played with a remote-control toy car. Draped over his shoulder was a machine gun — a real one.

"I'm a man. I have killed like a man," boasted another little boy. He looked 6 or 7 years old, with a gun nearly as tall as he was, but refused to give his age.

For orphans who have watched their parents killed by Liberian troops, the rebel camp offered a substitute family, food, and an opportunity for revenge.

"They are still little children, but how are we going to convince them of that when it's all over?" said Myrtle Gibson, a real estate agent who turned to relief work. "How are we going to make them real people again?"

"After this war, we're going to have a lot more wars to fight."

Hunger is the most immediate problem. Starving Monroviens ate the city's pet dogs and cats months ago. They ate zoo animals, including chimpanzees. Then they turned to the vegetation, eating weeds and slashing down palm trees to eat the filling but non-nutritious fiber under the bark.

A little food is on sale — bunches of green leaves and weeds, some stolen tinned goods, a few oranges, looted rice. But few can afford it.

The Belgian branch of the international aid group Doctors Without Borders started supplementary feeding now reaching 3,000 children with help from newly arrived United Nations workers.

U.N. representative Michael Heyn said the relief workers hoped to soon

feed 25,000 children. But he said 90,000 children in Monrovia alone need a special diet to recover.

Island Hospital has become a center for orphans of the war, children who have lost their parents in panicked rushes away from the fighting. Then there are the wounded, like a little girl whose leg had to be amputated, a boy who lost an eye.

Ellen James and other health workers go out on the streets to bring in starving children, but they can only help a few.

"We pick up 10, maybe 12; meanwhile they are dying in their hundreds," she said.

The hospital has no running water and little electricity. A generator was turned on only for emergency operations because of a fuel shortage. Monrovia has been without running water, electricity and regular food supplies for six months.

The victims in the war have been mostly civilians. It is not known how many have died — certainly more than the 10,000 killed in the fighting that began last Dec. 23.

The war began a rebellion against the corrupt and oppressive government of the late President Samuel Doe and turned into a tribal conflict with three warring armies.

They agreed to a cease-fire on Nov. 28, but an interim government and other provisions still remain to be negotiated.

Hot air balloon strikes tower in urban area; four die in fall



COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) - A hot air balloon struck a broadcast tower near the city's downtown Tuesday and crashed in a wooded area behind the WBNS television studios, killing four people.

Three men, all licensed hot air balloon pilots, and a woman riding in the gondola were killed, police said.

Radio station WTVN-AM reported that the balloon took off from Mohawk Middle School, but no students from the school were on board.

Lt. Randy Thatcher of the State Highway Patrol said the balloon went into a steep climb to clear the broadcast tower.

"It snagged on the top of the antenna and fell," Thatcher said. "Half the descent was fairly slow until all the air was out of the envelope. Then it fell straight down very fast."

John Remy, a reporter for WTVN, said he was on his way to work when he saw the balloon hit the tower, which is 1,069 feet tall. He said the balloon appeared to fall about 900 feet.



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