

Cease-fire in gulf holds amid violations

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia - From the Euphrates to the Persian Gulf, U.S. and allied troops held their fire along a smoldering battlefront Thursday, weary, muddy but victorious in a lightning war that freed Kuwait and humbled Iraq.

Statesmen began what President Bush called "the difficult task" of securing the peace.

American paratrooper David Hochins had a warm vision of peace: "My girlfriend, good friends and good times."

Kuwaitis told reporters of murder, torture, rape and kidnapping at the hands of Iraqi troops who sacked their tiny nation in seven months of occupation.

"What I could tell you about the Iraqis," said optician Nizar A. Naccash. "I hate them from the inside of my blood."

Kuwaitis said thousands of their countrymen, mostly young men, were taken off to Iraq as hostages in the final days. Kuwait's U.N. ambassador put the number at 22,000, in addition to 8,632 Kuwaiti soldiers held prisoner by

Iraq. The return of Kuwaiti detainees was one demand set out by President Bush in declaring the cease-fire for midnight EST Wednesday.

The United States warned Thursday it might resume the offensive against the Iraqi military if Baghdad does not meet all the conditions, which also include the "immediate" release of U.S. and allied prisoners of war.

"There's still great concern about the next several days," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said. Bush later announced the Iraqis had agreed to designate military commanders to discuss the cease-fire terms.

The U.S. command reported some cease-fire violations Thursday, including an incident in which Iraqi gunners fired on troops of the U.S. XVIII Airborne Corps retrieving the bodies of American airmen killed in a helicopter crash. The Americans fired back and destroyed two tanks and two multiple-rocket launchers, the command said.

Other isolated clashes continued with pock-

ets of Iraqi troops in mid-afternoon Thursday, Associated Press correspondent Neil MacFarquhar reported from the field. The Iraqi units involved had been bypassed in the swift advance of allied forces.

The commander of British forces in the coalition, Lt. Gen. Peter de la Billiere, said some Iraqi troops pinned down by Desert Storm forces appeared "bewildered" by the stand-down.

"I think they're going to sit it out until they run out of water and food. Then they'll have to surrender," he told reporters.

Iraqi soldiers straggling north toward the southern Iraqi city of Basra were screened at checkpoints by allied troops looking for members of units suspected of atrocities in Kuwait.

The Saudi ambassador to Washington said an estimated 85,000 to 100,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed and wounded as their army was shattered in 37 days of air bombardment followed by four days of ground war. Some 80,000

Iraqis are prisoners.

The U.S. command said the American casualty toll for the war stood at 79 killed in action, 212 wounded in action and 45 missing in action. An additional 52 Americans are listed as non-combat deaths, and nine are known to be prisoners of war.

The Saudis reported 44 of their soldiers killed in action, and the British 15.

The fury of the final days could be seen Thursday on the Kuwait-Basra road, jammed up with the broken, burned-out hulks of scores of vehicles that tried to flee north but were caught in air strikes, both Iraqi army trucks and civilian sedans commandeered by retreating troops.

After a 2 1/2-day dash across the trackless desert in sandstorms and heavy rains, the U.S. 3rd Armored Division and other units swept in behind Guard positions and caught Iraqi units as they sought to manage a withdrawal northeastward, toward Basra.

Iraq agrees to talks; POWs to be back

WASHINGTON - One day after halting the war, President Bush announced Thursday that Iraq had promptly agreed to talks on a permanent cease-fire and the return of prisoners of war.

"We are going to get back our POWs and we're going to do it fast," Bush declared.

The administration said Secretary of State James Baker will fly to the Middle East next week to begin chart-

ing the postwar future of the Persian Gulf. He will stop in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and Israel, as well as Turkey.

Baker also will go to the Soviet Union.

As long as Saddam Hussein remains in power in Iraq, the administration will urge the U.N. Security Council to maintain a ban on all weapon shipments to that nation, officials said.

Bush met with the ambassador of newly liberated Kuwait. He then went to the Rose Garden to announce Iraq's willingness to discuss peace terms set out Wednesday night in his announcement of a conditional cease-fire.

Bush said Baghdad had taken a first step by agreeing to name military commanders to talk with U.S.-led allies about battlefield arrangements to make the pause in fighting permanent. "We will go promptly back to them with the arrangements," Bush said. He said the meeting will take place very soon.

Bush said that the return of POWs and seized Kuwaitis will be a primary subject "and we expect a prompt repatriation of them, Kuwaiti detainees and others."

"We are going to get back our POWs and we're going to do it fast," Bush said. Forty-five Americans are

missing, and at least eight are believed to be Iraqi prisoners.

Bush skirted reporters' questions about whether he will insist on prosecution of Saddam for war crimes. "We're not going to get into that," Bush said. "These matters will all be discussed in appropriate forums."

White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater said a pullout might begin in days, but cautioned that "it took seven months to get in, it's going to take a lot of months to get out. But we're going to start a steady withdrawal." Some 537,000 Americans are stationed in the gulf.

Pentagon spokesman Pete Williams, asked about Fitzwater's comment, said, "There is no plan yet for bringing forces home."

Bush said the end of the war brings "a great day for all Americans." To visiting French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, Bush said, "You come here on an exciting day for all Americans."

Although reopening the war remains an option, Fitzwater said, "You can assume that we wouldn't have declared a cease-fire... a suspension if we had any intention of resuming (hostilities)."



OPERATION DESERT STORM

Gulf Toll in the Persian Gulf War

Allies flew more than 110,000 missions in the Persian Gulf war. Ninety-seven Iraqi planes and six helicopters were destroyed. More than 80,000 Iraqi prisoners of war were taken, including 3,000 before the ground offensive. Here's a breakdown of U.S. and allied losses in the war:

Table with 4 columns: Category, Americans, Allied Forces, Total. Rows include Killed in action, Non-combat deaths, Missing in action, Prisoners of war, Planes lost in combat, and Non-combat plane losses.

Americans want troops home, but most will have to wait

DHAHRAN, Saudi Arabia - The U.S. pullout from the Persian Gulf is expected to take months, and reservists probably will be called up and sent in with other fresh troops to organize the exodus, the military said Thursday.

Some of the half-million American troops, such as those held past the end of their military obligation or those with family crises, could be on their way home by the weekend, officials said. Many others could be here far longer.

"It took seven months to get in. It's going to take many months to get out," White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said in Washington. "But we're going to start a steady withdrawal."

The overall plan, updated continuously during the six-month U.S. deployment, calls for sending troops home by unit on a first-in, first-out basis.

But a date to begin the exodus cannot be set until peace with Iraq is certain, military officials said.

"Can I give you a time? No, I really can't," Marine Brig. Gen. Richard Neal, deputy director of operations for Operation Desert Storm, said

in Riyadh when asked if the command had a timetable for shipping troops home.

"We're going to have to find out how this peace process develops," he said. "If things go well, I think you will see a quick return for some forces."

Each unit will have to designate logistics personnel — such as equipment haulers, maintenance workers and administrative workers — to stay behind to prepare, pack and inventory equipment for the trip home.

And the U.S. command said some additional logistics, maintenance and other support units will probably be brought to Saudi Arabia to help get the troops on their way back to the United States and other U.S. bases around the world.

"There may be an opportunity to replace a lot of those combat-oriented forces," Neal said. "We'll get people that can run port facilities. We'll get people that can prepare equipment, i.e. clean it up and get it ready to go aboard ship."

Many units with these specialties are reserves. Some already are here and will probably have their stays extended; other similar units probably will be activated.

Military officials said it is too soon to say how many troops will be needed to be called up.

It is also possible that new combat units will be brought in if the U.S. forces are involved in any long peacekeeping operation in Kuwait, officials said.

For troops in the field, the cease-fire, although tentative, immediately brought thoughts of home.

"I can't wait to get home," said Capt. Fred Gellert of Detroit and the 101st Airborne Division. "I just hope it comes soon."

Shipping more than a half-million troops and their gear home to their bases is a daunting challenge to planners, perhaps even more difficult to organize than the U.S. buildup.

The buildup accelerated gradually over the nearly seven months since the Aug. 2 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, yet still proved an unprecedented strain on air and sea transports.

Some units are now deep into Iraq and will have to be brought hundreds of miles south to ports and airfields in Saudi Arabia. Heavy equipment transports are in short supply, and ships to carry equipment home are a month away at U.S. ports.

Bush asks Soviets to dissuade Sandinistas

WASHINGTON - The Bush administration asked the Soviet Union Friday to dissuade the Sandinista-dominated military in Nicaragua from sending weaponry to leftist groups elsewhere in Central America.

"We believe that the Soviets, as long-time suppliers of the Sandinista military, have an obligation to take all appropriate measures to end Sandinista military support to regional insurgent and terrorist groups," the State Department said.

Although the leftist Sandinista government was defeated in elections a year ago, President Violeta Chamorro permitted the Sandinistas to retain

control over the military as part of her national reconciliation program.

Assistant Secretary of State Bernard Aronson and his chief deputy for Central America, Joseph Sullivan, flew to Madrid on Wednesday for talks with Soviet officials about the alleged Sandinista activities. The discussions were held Friday.

The latest incident occurred last Friday when, the State Department said, a truck carrying Sandinista Army weaponry from Nicaragua to Honduras was intercepted by Honduran authorities near the border between the two countries.

Officials said the shipment was

earmarked for the Popular Movement for Liberation, a leftist Honduran group informally known as the Cinchoneros. The shipment included 32 Soviet-made rocket propelled grenades, 42 grenade launchers and other equipment.

A spokesman for the Sandinista Army said the matter was under investigation but he acknowledged that "certain radical elements" within the Sandinista military support like-minded groups in Honduras.

A State Department statement expressed concern about the "continued Sandinista support of regional insurgents and terrorists."

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