

Hundreds surrender after Russian White House attack

MOSCOW — Army tanks blasted holes in the parliament building just after dawn Monday and commandos stormed inside through smoke and flame to crush an armed challenge by hard-liners opposed to President Boris Yeltsin. Hundreds surrendered, but sporadic gunfire persisted after sundown.

The hard-liners' leaders — Vice President Alexander Rutskoi and parliament speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov — were in custody, Yeltsin aide Dmitri Rurikov told CNN.

What appeared to be a crucial victory for Yeltsin in the fight for political control in Russia came with a high price. Soldiers piled dozens of bodies outside the building after the nearly 10-hour battle, which climaxed the worst political violence in Moscow since the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.

Hundreds of lawmakers and supporters, hands on their heads, filed out of the burning building and were ushered by troops onto waiting buses in late afternoon. Gunfire erupted several times during the surrender, scattering crowds of onlookers outside the white marble building known as the Russian White House.

After nightfall, snipers periodically

shot glowing tracer bullets from the White House and neighboring buildings, indicating some parliament supporters were holding out.

Vladimir Polyakov, spokesman for Yeltsin's chief of staff Sergei Filatov, said hard-line lawmakers themselves had capitulated.

As convoys of tanks and other army vehicles moved into the area after dark, fire raged along much of an upper floor of the shattered parliament building. Orange flames flared from windows elsewhere in the 19-story structure.

The government's assault came in response to Sunday's violent attempt by the hard-liners to seize some government buildings and topple Yeltsin. The sides have been at bitter odds since Yeltsin ordered parliament dissolved two weeks ago and set early elections for December.

Leaders of parliament had barricaded themselves in the White House with armed supporters, challenging Yeltsin's effort to establish himself as the supreme authority in restructuring Russia. The parliament, which was elected before the Soviet collapse and was dominated by Communists, tried to hinder his reforms.

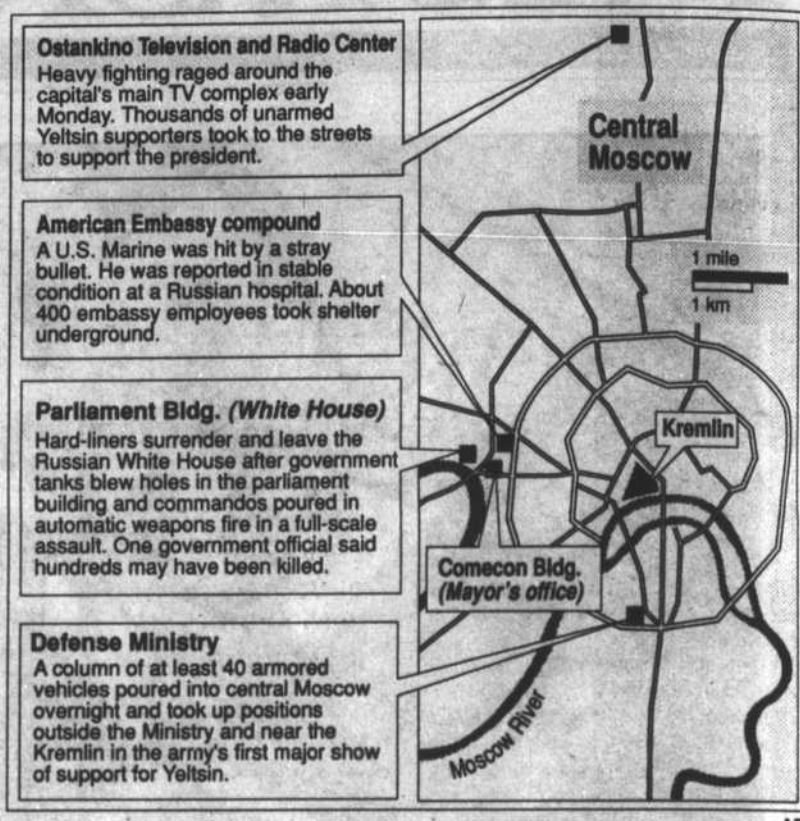
The army's assault opened about 7 a.m., flames spitting from the barrels of T-72 tanks as they pounded the White House. Papers fluttered from the shattered windows, followed by heavy black smoke. Machine guns blasted from a neighboring hotel and apartment house.

The parliament's defenders threw firebombs and fired back from the barricaded building as well as from the nearby mayor's office they captured Sunday.

No accurate casualty count was available. Yeltsin's military adviser, Gen. Dmitry Volkogonov, initially told reporters that up to 500 might have been killed inside the White House, but stressed "that's not confirmed."

Crowds watched from a distance as the battle unfolded after a two-week standoff that began when Yeltsin ordered parliament dissolved and decreed early elections.

Yeltsin was answering the hard-liners' challenge to his authority over his efforts to restructure the economy. The parliament, which was elected before the collapse of the Soviet Union and was dominated for Communists, tried to hinder Yeltsin's reforms.



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NEWS BRIEFS

12 U.S. soldiers dead in Somalia battle

NAIROBI, Kenya — At least 12 U.S. Army soldiers died, 75 were wounded and "a small number" were feared taken captive in Somalia as U.N. troops attacked forces loyal to fugitive warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, Pentagon officials said Monday. As the battle raged in the streets of Mogadishu, the Pentagon prepared to send about 200 infantrymen, bolstered by tanks and armored vehicles, to bolster the U.S. forces battered in the latest round of fighting, other officials said.

Two senior Pentagon officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said reports indicate at least 12 U.S. soldiers have been killed in the recent fighting in Mogadishu and that 75 have been wounded.

"It could go higher," one of the officials said of the death toll.

Somalis dragged the body of an American soldier through the streets of Mogadishu today and danced around the wreckage of U.S. helicopters and armored personnel carriers destroyed in a firefight.

Two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters were shot down in the U.N. search for Aidid's key lieutenants.

NBC News reported that seven Army Rangers were missing and may have been taken hostage. An administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, would not confirm the report but said the administration expected Aidid's forces to announce they had captured U.S. troops.

Former priest convicted of child molestation

NEW BEDFORD, Mass. — A former Roman Catholic priest Monday pleaded guilty to molesting dozens of children three decades ago as his victims watched in a crowded courtroom.

James A. Porter, 58, who left the priesthood in the 1970s, pleaded guilty to 41 counts in Bristol County Superior Court where his trial had been scheduled to begin later this month. Sentencing was set for Dec. 6.

Porter had been charged with abusing 32 children who are now adults, and only began publicly telling their

stories less than two years ago when one of the victims began building a case against them.

Prosecutors said Porter molested his victims on church property.

Porter had admitted previously that he molested "a number of children" and said he was a "very sick man." But he hoped to block the charges by arguing they were outdated.

Porter, who is married and has four children and lives in Minnesota, was convicted last year of molesting his children's baby sitter in the 1980s.

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