

Russia continues Grozny attack

GROZNY, Russia — Trying new tactics in their assault on Chechnya's capital, Russian forces Sunday unleashed systematic rocket and mortar fire pounding the city with up to a dozen shells a minute.

They were trying to scatter Chechen fighters defending the presidential palace and prepare the way for Russian ground troops to move in.

But the strategy seemed only partially successful against outgunned but spirited defenders, who have been able to sneak around to counterattack from behind.

"We have no problem destroying any armored vehicles they send into the city," said 29-year-old fighter Lyomo Sayatov, taking a rest in a bomb shelter. "We have enough ammunition to fight to the end."

Under the constant drumming of explosions, small truckloads of rebels raced toward central Grozny carrying rebels who shouted, "Allah Akbar" - God is Great. Every 10 minutes or so, a truck would return with the wounded.

The past two days of fighting evidently had taken their toll on the hardy Chechen fighters - there was no singing and dancing as

before and there were few smiles. But the fighters insisted nothing could pry them from Grozny.

Sunday was the ninth day of the Russian ground attack on Grozny, capital of the breakaway southern republic. Several thousand people have been killed and wounded since Russian troops went into Chechnya on Dec. 11, and the Red Cross estimates 350,000 people are refugees.

The vicious pounding continued two days after President Boris Yeltsin demanded to know why the city was being bombed despite his orders to halt. Government statements in Moscow have differed sharply from reality in Chechnya, leaving the impression that Russia's commander-in-chief is not fully in control.

Yeltsin sent tens of thousands of troops into Chechnya, a mostly Muslim region of 1.2 million people, in a bid to reassert Moscow's control.

Russian reinforcements continued to arrive Sunday. About 10 light tanks accompanied by more than 30 trucks carrying troops and ammunition rumbled in from the southwest.

Russian forces also launched sporadic air attacks on outlying

villages and ridges, where Chechen fighters have deployed in recent weeks to conduct a guerrilla war.

Russian troops in Grozny were positioned roughly in an arc running from northwest to northeast of the prized presidential palace, in central Freedom Square.

Tank and paratroop units were trying to move in from the east near the central market and the west from the railway station in a bid to encircle the palace.

The multi-story building has taken several direct hits and has been gutted by fire on its top floors, but rebels still held the palace on Sunday.

The heaviest attack came from long-range rockets, artillery and mortar fire. Small craters, burned-out rocket nose cones, contorted steel and a sea of smashed glass marked the site of a missile attack on Grozny's main bus station just west of the city center.

The fighting has started to drive even the stalwart remaining residents from Grozny, once home to 400,000 people. Rebels pushed an elderly woman in a wheelbarrow from the city center. A family with belongings packed into a carriage filed along a road south of Grozny, with no idea where they'd go.

Former cult leader Ryan seeks new trial

Michael Ryan, facing death in the electric chair for the gruesome torture and murder of a man who once considered him a religious leader, wants the state Supreme Court to give him a new trial.

Ryan also contends that portions of Nebraska law under which he was sentenced to death are unconstitutional.

Robert Creager of Lincoln, Ryan's lawyer, said oral arguments today before the high court would show Ryan hasn't had adequate legal representation. Defense attorneys also claim the courts made a variety of errors that violated Ryan's rights.

Ryan, the one-time leader of a religious cult that centered on himself, was sentenced to die in the electric chair after being convicted in Richardson County for the torture slaying of James Thimm, 26.

Thimm's body was found by authorities in 1985 during a raid on the cult's farm near Rulo, 10 miles east of Falls City in extreme southeastern Nebraska.

Ryan also was sentenced to life in prison after pleading no contest to second-degree murder in the slaying of 5-year-old Luke Stice, the son of a former Ryan follower.

The state Supreme Court has affirmed Ryan's conviction. Ryan sought further review, arguing that his lawyers erred during his trial and in presenting his first appeal. He also said portions of the state's death penalty law are unconstitutional.

The court appointed retired District Judge DeWayne Wolf of Kearney to handle the review. Wolf ruled last February that Ryan's constitutional rights weren't violated and that his legal representation met required standards.

The issue now before the Supreme Court is whether Wolf ruled properly.

Four other men, including Ryan's son, Dennis, were convicted of charges related to Thimm's murder. Only

Michael Ryan was sentenced to death.

Ryan contended that prosecutors overstated his role in Thimm's death while downplaying the actions of those who testified against him. He also said he offered to help Thimm get away from the cult's farm.

Prosecutors said Thimm was tortured for at least three days before he died when Ryan stomped on his chest. Medical experts also testified that Thimm would have died without Ryan's action because of internal injuries he suffered when tortured.

In 1989, Ryan said publicly that he believed God had been present on the farm and intended for Thimm and Stice to die.

Witnesses against Ryan said he beat and otherwise abused Luke Stice. Ryan said he never touched the child.

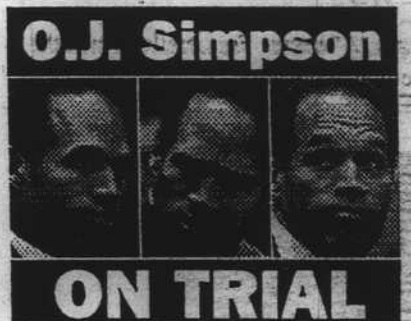
Testimony and other evidence showed Thimm had been whipped, sodomized, partially skinned, had suffered broken bones and the tips of his fingers had been shot. There also was testimony that Thimm had been forced to have sex with another group member, had been chained to a porch, was forced to sleep in a dog house and was otherwise abused.

Dennis Ryan and Timothy Haverkamp were sentenced to life in prison for second-degree murder in Thimm's death. James Haverkamp and John David Andreas, who pleaded guilty to reduced charges in exchange for their testimony against the Ryans, received 30-year sentences for possession of stolen property, carrying concealed weapons and second-degree assault.

In 1990, Dennis Ryan renounced his father's teachings and said that his dad should die in the electric chair.

Cult members testified that Ryan told them that Yahweh (God) wanted them to prepare for the biblical battle of Armageddon, which would pit the forces of good and evil against one another.

Simpson's motives for book in question



LOS ANGELES (AP) - O.J. Simpson's upcoming book probably won't contain any startling revelations and may be just an attempt to gain good publicity and much-needed cash, legal analysts said Sunday.

"I can't believe defense lawyers didn't go over this with a fine-toothed comb to find out if there's anything that could hurt them," said Loyola University law professor Stanley Goldman. "If there is, they would have cut it out."

However, it could give prosecutors grounds to seek delays while they study its contents.

The book: "I Want to Tell You," reportedly describes Simpson's agony over being wrongly accused of the June 12 killings of ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman.

It is Simpson's response to more than 300,000 pieces of mail he has received since he was arrested, Lawrence Schiller, who collaborated

with Simpson on the project, told The New York Times.

Simpson receives 2,000 to 3,000 pieces of mail daily from people all over the world, including children who enclose their allowances, Robert Kardashian, Simpson's longtime personal lawyer, told the newspaper.

The book is to be published next month, the Times reported Sunday. Neither Schiller nor the publishing house, Little, Brown & Co. of New York, returned calls for comment Sunday.

Schiller, a former neighbor of Simpson's, is a producer, director and journalist. He collaborated with Norman Mailer on his Pulitzer Prize-winning "Executioner's Song" and Mailer's forthcoming "Oswald's Tale: An American Mystery."

News of the book came just before the start of a hearing on whether jurors may hear evidence about domestic violence in Simpson's marriage.

Prosecutors may seek a delay in the start of Wednesday's hearing since the book reportedly discusses allegations of spousal abuse, and prosecutors could seek more time to investigate, analysts said.

Prosecutors could subpoena the manuscript of the book since it is a public statement, not a private, privileged discussion such as one between a lawyer and client. They also could get notes or taped interviews that

went into the book's production, analysts said.

District attorney spokeswoman Suzanne Childs said prosecutors had no comment about the book. Simpson's defense lawyers did not immediately return calls for comment. Goldman's father denounced the book.

"I guess it's another disgusting attempt at commercialism. Coming from the defendant, it's perhaps even more outrageous," Fred Goldman told KABC-TV in Los Angeles.

Legal analysts said it probably wasn't a coincidence that the first word of the book, and sketchy details of its content, came out while the 24 jurors and alternates were still unsequestered. The panelists are set to be sequestered on Wednesday.

The book also came to light at a time when Simpson's lawyers have been complaining about the financial burden the case has caused him.

"Some of this is about earning money to be able to pay his legal fees. And I think some of this is about reclaiming his public image," said Erwin Chemerinsky, a law professor at the University of Southern California.

Nobody would comment on how much Simpson was paid. The publishing company is planning an initial press run of 500,000 copies, the Times said.

Bushes celebrate 50th anniversary

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Former President Bush's favorite music group is the Oak Ridge Boys. He quoted Loretta Lynn on the campaign trail in his losing re-election bid.

So they and other members of the country music establishment signed on to serenade George and Barbara Bush at the Grand Ole Opry on Sunday for their 50th wedding anniversary.

The couple's actual golden anniversary was Friday.

News... in a Minute

Gas prices expected to rise

LOS ANGELES — Prices at the nation's gas pumps fell slightly during the holidays but are likely to creep back up in the coming weeks, an industry analyst said Sunday.

The average price for all grades of gas, including taxes, was 119.56 cents a gallon, according to Friday's Lundberg Survey of 10,000 stations across the country. That was a drop of 0.40 cents from Dec. 16.

Motorists in some parts of the country already have seen pump prices rise a little as supplies of new cleaner-burning gasoline move into the marketplace, Trilby Lundberg said.

"The overall national average has dropped probably for the last time," said Lundberg, the survey publisher. "If crude oil prices remain steady, retail prices will likely edge up a bit in the next few weeks."

The average price at self-serve pumps was 112.68 cents for regular unleaded; 123.29 cents for mid-grade unleaded; 131.75 for premium unleaded and 118.58 cents for regular leaded.

Full-service prices were 147.57 cents for regular unleaded; 156.29 cents for mid-grade; 163.61 cents for premium unleaded and 130.82 cents for regular leaded.

Freshmen attitude survey released

WASHINGTON — A national survey of first-year college students released Sunday by the Higher Education Research Institute found this year's college freshmen are less interested and involved in politics than any previous entering class; and a declining number said community activism is a very important goal in life.

Tobacco use and support for legalizing marijuana increased while the percent who reported drinking beer in the past year reached an all-time low of 53.2 percent, compared to 54.4 percent in 1993 and 75.2 percent in 1981.

Prisoners forced to escape

BOGOTA, Colombia — Leftist rebels stormed a jail in a state capital Sunday and freed 93 prisoners, some of whom later returned and surrendered, police said.

The 35 escapees who returned to the jail in Mocoa, 310 miles south of Bogota, said they had been forced to flee the prison. Most of the prisoners had been charged with or convicted of drug crimes.

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