

Nation/World
From The Associated Press

Army: Prosecutions on sex charges will go forward

WASHINGTON — Judicial proceedings involving charges of sexual misconduct at the Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground will go forward, Army Secretary Togo West said Wednesday.

West and Defense Secretary William Cohen said the Army will examine allegations by five women soldiers that military investigators tried to coerce them into falsely accusing superiors of rape. They said they resisted, and rape was not among charges filed against the men.

West, pressed by the House National Security Committee, said he "would certainly consider an internal review" of the women's coercion allegations aired Tuesday. He said he interprets the women's statements as allegations of "untoward and perhaps illegal" behavior by the investigators.

U.S., other embassies begin evacuation in Albania

TIRANA, Albania — The newly designated premier met a rebel leader in southern Albania today, then rushed to Tirana to try to quell unrest that crept closer to the capital.

Fearing more violence, the Italian, French and British embassies said they would send all non-essential embassy personnel out of the country. A source with the U.S. Embassy in Tirana said the United States was evacuating diplomats' families.

In Tirana, gangs who apparently supported embattled President Sali Berisha took guns from a vacated military academy. Police took no action as men calmly walked out of the academy's gates with AK-47 automatic weapons slung over their shoulders.

Rosa Parks honored as 'first lady of civil rights'

WASHINGTON — Rosa Parks, who took the most famous bus ride in U.S. history, was honored by the American Public Transit Association on Wednesday with its first lifetime achievement award.

"It is because she chose to sit where she sat that I can stand where I stand," said Gordon J. Linton, the head of the Federal Transit Administration. He called Parks the "first lady of civil rights."

Parks was honored for her refusal on Dec. 1, 1955, to surrender her seat on a segregated Montgomery, Ala., city bus to a white passenger as the law required. Her arrest sparked a yearlong boycott of Montgomery buses by blacks that propelled the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. into prominence.

Latest Israeli-Palestinian crisis cools somewhat

JERUSALEM — Softening his tone after days of harsh statements, Yasser Arafat said today he was ready to continue peace talks despite the crisis over Israel's limited West Bank troop withdrawal offer.

The United States, meanwhile, pressed Israel to delay construction of a Jewish neighborhood in disputed east Jerusalem and to make other gestures to avert the collapse of the peace process.

First lady urges U.S. help for African democracy effort

WASHINGTON (AP)—First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton declared Wednesday there are "far more grounds for hope than despair" in Africa and said America's values and interests are at stake in supporting the growing democratic movement on the continent.

Clinton, who is preparing for a goodwill journey to Africa this weekend, said African nations are ripe for economic investment. She pointed out that the United States accounts for only 7 percent of the African market at a time when the number of democratic governments there has risen from five to 23.

"Africa is on the move with a new generation of leaders," Clinton said during an address at the State Department commemorating International Women's Day. "For the first time in history, we can say in Africa there are far more grounds for hope than despair."

"We will make progress together,"

she said. "America's interests are at stake, but far more importantly, America's values are at stake."

The first lady leaves Saturday for a two-week mission to six countries that will survey African history from the horrors of the 17th century slave trade to the promise of post-apartheid South Africa.

Clinton is going to Africa at the request of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the president, who has not visited the continent since taking office.

Albright said she looks forward to the first lady's report on her travels, calling Africa "a region of importance to the United States."

Clinton last visited in May 1994 for the inauguration of South African President Nelson Mandela. During that visit, Clinton said she was moved by Mandela's decision to invite three of his former jailers to his inauguration.

"People have to change their hearts. They have to be able to forgive," she said.

The first lady will meet with Mandela again and will accompany him to Robben Island, the prison where he was jailed for 27 years. She then will tour Soweto, a black township that is slowly emerging from the rigors of apartheid, South Africa's official system of racial segregation that was dismantled with Mandela's rise to power.

Clinton will travel to Tanzania for a discussion on genocide and rape with officials of a war crimes tribunal. And she will visit a grassroots democracy training session in Senegal after stopping at Goree Island, once a hub of the African slave trade.

The first lady also will stop in Eritrea, Uganda and Zimbabwe to explore efforts on AIDS prevention, family planning, education and helping small businesses get started.

Florida frees 300 felons

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Mitchell Sexton fatally stabbed his father with a double-edged knife and used an electrical cord to hang the body from the handle of an exercise bike.

Norman James Eastman beat a 2-year-old to death for vomiting in his Corvette, punching the child so hard that the youngster's bowels ruptured.

Johnny L. Yearby led a gang of teens who cornered a homeless man in a courtyard and beat him to death with a baseball bat as he yelled, "Why are you doing this to me?" They picked over his body, even removing his shoes to look for money.

The men were among 300 rapists, robbers and other felons freed this week from prisons across the state in one of the biggest mass releases of violent lawbreakers in Florida history. Two hundred more will probably be released on Monday, and an additional

2,200 will go free in the coming months and years.

The convicts left prison on Tuesday because of a U.S. Supreme Court decision last month that restored "gain time" — time off that the state automatically granted to prisoners to relieve overcrowding, then took away.

"A hell of a lot of innocent people are going to be robbed, raped and murdered," Lee County Sheriff John McDougall said Wednesday. "How many people are going to have to die in order to pay for this blunder?"

He predicted most of the released felons will commit new crimes.

"Here we are telling all these people, 'Come to Florida. Enjoy our sunshine. Enjoy our beaches,'" he said. "Oh, and by the way, we're sending all these hardened criminals out onto the streets to strike again. But have a good time."

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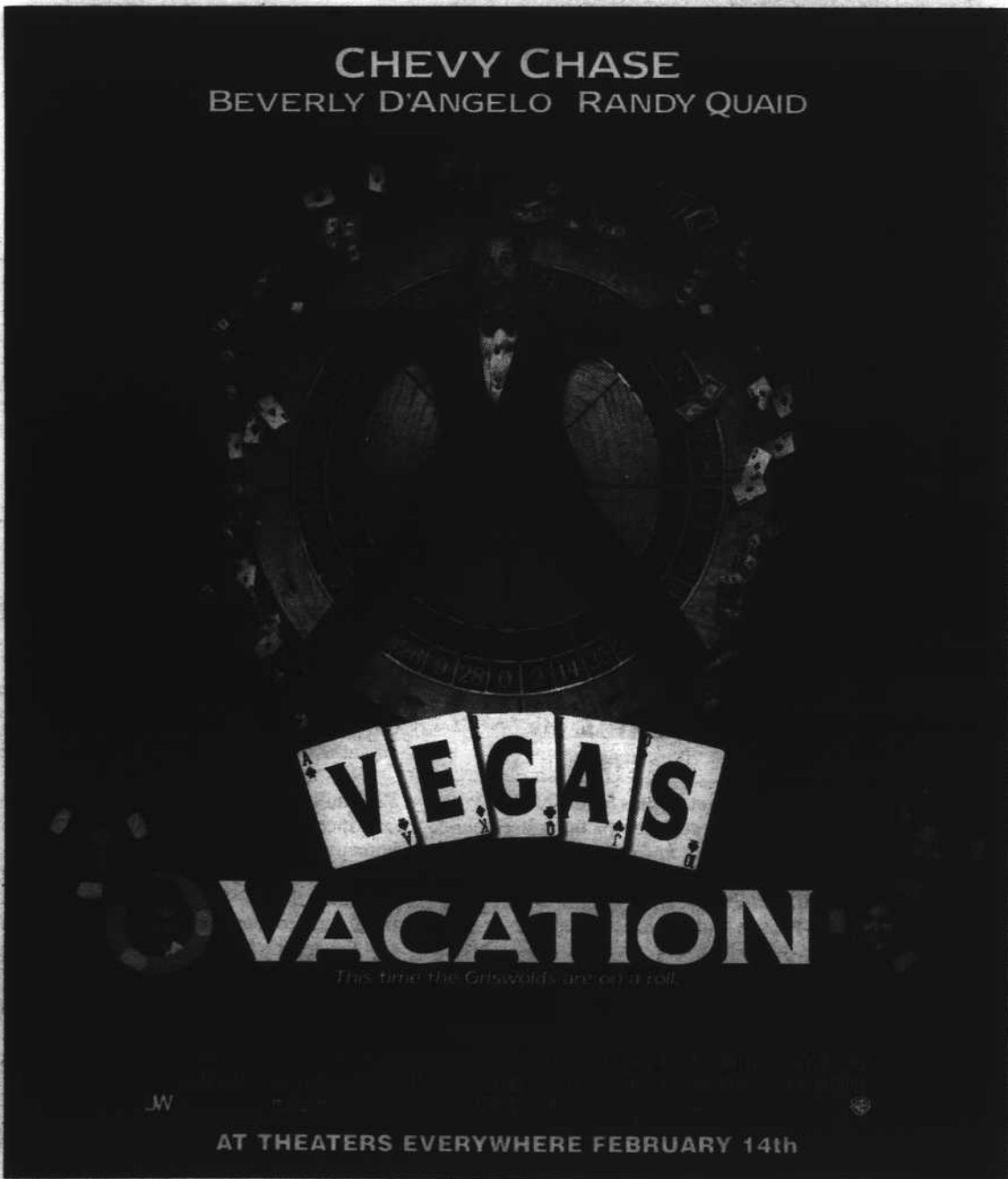
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