

NEWS DIGEST

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1999

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Supremacist convicted in slaying

John William King may get the death penalty for the 1998 dragging murder of James Byrd Jr.

JASPER, Texas (AP) — A white supremacist was convicted of murder Tuesday and could get the death penalty for chaining a black man to a pickup truck and dragging him until his body was torn to pieces in a crime that shocked the nation with its savagery.

The jury of 11 whites and one black took less than 2½ hours to reach a verdict against John William King in the slaying last June of James Byrd Jr. Courtroom spectators applauded and the victim's relatives broke into tears.

The jury then began hearing evidence on whether the 24-year-old laborer should get the death penalty or life in prison for one of the grisliest racial crimes in the United States since the civil rights era.

"I am relieved," said Stella Brumley, Byrd's sister. "That's all we wanted, was justice."

His son, Ross Byrd, said: "All I

know is that there's one down and two to go."

King was the first of three white men to go on trial in the slaying, which prosecutors said he carried out because he wanted "something dramatic" to gain credibility for a racist group he was organizing.

King leaned forward when the verdict was read, shielding himself from cameras, then sat back in his chair with his fingers on his chin.

One of his lawyers said King was not surprised by the verdict and considered himself the victim of a conspiracy.

Byrd's head and arm were found torn off after he was pulled nearly three miles while tied by his ankles with a 2½-foot logging chain.

"Three robed riders coming straight out of hell — that's exactly what there was that night," prosecutor Pat Hardy said in closing arguments Tuesday.

The evidence against King included a lighter engraved with a Klan symbol and King's prison name, "Possum," that was found along with cigarette butts at the scene; clothes stained with Byrd's blood; letters in which King wrote

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PAT HARDY
prosecutor

about organizing a racist gang; and King's tattoos of a black man hanging from a tree, cartoon characters in Klan garb, Nazi-type SS lightning bolts and Aryan power proclamations.

According to testimony, King talked with a fellow inmate a few years ago about "taking a black out" to prove himself as a white supremacist. After his release in 1997, King tried to start a racist group, the Texas Rebel Soldiers, and was looking for an opportunity to make a name for himself, prosecutors said.

King's lawyers called only three witnesses who testified for less than an hour. King did not take the stand.

His attorneys appeared to have conceded the conviction and planned to try to save his life in the punishment phase.

They insisted that the racist writings did not prove the case against King and that the convicted burglar covered himself in racist tattoos as protection from blacks in prison.

"I don't deny he made some racial slurs," attorney Haden "Sonny" Cribbs said. "Not that I agree with that. But that is his right."

King's alleged accomplices, Shawn Berry, 24 and Lawrence Russell Brewer, 31, are awaiting trial and could also face the death penalty.

Turkish government formally arrests Ocalan

ANKARA, Turkey (AP) — At a secret hearing on a forbidding prison island, Turkey formally arrested the foremost Kurdish rebel leader on treason charges Tuesday, paving the way for trial by a security tribunal. Prosecutors said they would seek the death penalty.

Abdullah Ocalan's Turkish attorney was barred from the hearing or conferring with his client, who has been under interrogation for a week without seeing a lawyer.

Ocalan, 49, leads the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK, a rebel army that has fought for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey's impoverished southeast.

The conflict has claimed an estimated 37,000 lives, with the toll growing daily. On Tuesday, the government reported the deaths of 14 rebels in clashes with Turkish troops in the mountains.

Tuesday's hearing was closed to the press and public. Its outcome was reported by the semi-official Anatolia

news agency, which cited statements from the judge and prosecutors.

Turkey has insisted that Ocalan's trial in a security court with military judges will be fair. It has also warned against any outside interference, repeating Tuesday that foreign monitors will not be allowed to attend.

Ocalan's lawyer, Osman Baydemir, said he complained to the Justice Ministry about being kept from his client and said he was worried that the rebel leader may have been subject to "wrongful interrogation procedures."

In Strasbourg, France, the European Court of Human Rights said it was seeking a "speedy response" from Turkey to its queries about Ocalan's access to lawyers.

Russell Johnston of Britain, the head of the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly, canceled a visit to Ankara to check on preparations for the trial. He said Turkey told him he was not welcome.

Serbs settle with ethnic Albanians

More talks to be held in March

RAMBOUILLET, France (AP) — Serbs agreed in principle Tuesday to give limited self-rule to majority ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, but the two sides failed after 17 days of intense negotiations to conclude a deal for ending their yearlong conflict. More talks were scheduled for March.

The partial settlement puts on hold, at least temporarily, NATO's threats to bomb Serb targets if they don't adopt the complex plan that would force them to withdraw troops from Kosovo and accept NATO peacekeepers.

After four days of strenuous personal diplomacy, shuttling between the two sides, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright accepted less than she had insisted on.

There was no provision for deploying NATO peacekeepers in the tense province to enforce the settlement, and the Serbs refused to give their consent to major elements of the self-rule sought by the ethnic Albanians.

According to senior U.S. officials, the Serbs still insist on Serbian courts for Serbs accused of crimes, refuse to permit the ethnic Albanians to have a president and are unwilling to cooperate with a war crimes tribunal looking into atrocities against civilians committed during the war that has claimed some 2,000 lives.

"But we have broken the stalemate that hung over Kosovo for so long," Albright said.

The Albanians also hedged. They were given two weeks for "consultations" with people in the province and still are insisting on a referendum to vote for independence and secession from Serbia at the end of the three-year autonomy trial period envisioned by the accord formulated by the United States, Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Russia.

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... We have broken the stalemate that hung over Kosovo for so long.”

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT
U.S. secretary of state

The settlement also calls for a restoration of the cease-fire that was arranged by U.S. envoy Richard Holbrooke last October and for the staged removal of Serbian troops and special police units — but only after a NATO force is deployed to enforce the agreement.

In order to put a halt to the protracted negotiations, which ran through two deadlines, the ethnic Albanians and Serbs agreed to another round of talks in France, beginning March 15.

"We have done a lot here even if we have not done enough," said British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who co-chaired the talks with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine. "We will use the next three weeks to convince the Serbs and to convince the Albanians that the agreement is a good bargain for both sides."

Meanwhile, the violence continued.

In Pristina, Yugoslavia, five Serb policemen were wounded when suspected rebels opened fire on Serb mourners, who gathered under police escort at the home of Mirko Milosevic, a civilian killed Monday allegedly by the rebel Kosovo Liberation Army.

World and Nation DATELINES

Lebanon

Lebanese, Israelis square off; guerrillas ambush squad

BEIRUT (AP) — Lebanese guerrillas ambushed an elite Israeli commando squad Tuesday, killing its commander and two officers and wounding five soldiers in a painful blow to Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

The troops were moving north of the Israeli-occupied zone when they ran into Hezbollah guerrillas.

Washington, D.C.

U.S. fighters drop bombs on Iraqi command center

The Associated Press — Two U.S. F-15 fighters each dropped a 2,000-pound bomb on a military command and control installation in Iraq Tuesday after planes patrolling the northern no-fly zone came under anti-aircraft fire, Pentagon officials said.

Army Col. Richard Bridges added that in a separate incident, an unknown number of F-15s dropped 500-pound bombs on a multiple-launch rocket site used as an air defense facility. Both incidents occurred near Mosul, Iraq.

Washington, D.C.

Greenspan predicts economy will continue to flourish

The Associated Press — Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan said Tuesday a "surprisingly robust" U.S. economy should continue growing this year but at a much slower pace than last. And he dropped hints that if the slowdown doesn't occur, the central bank is prepared to increase interest rates to make it happen.

Delivering his twice-a-year report on Fed policy to Congress, Greenspan did not signal that a rate hike is imminent.

United Kingdom

Blair says Britain should prepare for euro

LONDON (AP) — Prime Minister Tony Blair on Tuesday set the government to work on preparing to join the euro, a step bound to face opposition in Britain.

Blair said the government's policy was still to wait and see how the new European currency worked before making a decision to adopt it. He said preparations must begin to provide a valid choice.

United Nations

U.N. report: Marijuana uses should be studied scientifically

The Associated Press — In-depth and impartial scientific studies should be conducted into marijuana's possible medical benefits, a U.N. report recommended Tuesday.

Only scientific evidence from the public and private sector can end the emotion-charged political debate over using cannabis for patients, said Herbert S. Okun, a member of the International Drug Control Board.

Peru

Fujimori flies woman to hospital to give birth

LIMA (AP) — Peru's president assisted in an unexpected delivery when a woman gave birth on his helicopter, newspapers reported Monday.

Alberto Fujimori was inspecting flood damage on Peru's northern coast Sunday when the father of Marcelina Rojas, 23, asked him to fly his daughter to a hospital. Rojas gave birth to a 6.6-pound baby boy before the helicopter could reach Chimbote, 225 miles northwest of Lima.

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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