

Orphans evacuate Sarajevo

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — A bullet-scarred bus carrying dozens of crying orphans raced from Sarajevo on Sunday on the second leg of an escape that has claimed at least two young lives.

Left behind were about 100 other children awaiting evacuation as Bosnian forces try to punch through Serb lines encircling the city. Bosnian officials claimed some success in the battles.

Many of the orphans sobbed and struggled Sunday as they were put on the bus in the western suburb of Stup, the end of the so-called "Sniper Alley" highway from central Sarajevo.

One blond toddler kicked as a burly soldier carried her under his arm to the bus. But another little boy happily sucked a candy bar and climbed aboard.

The bus traveled through war-torn territory en route to the Croatian port of Split, where officials from a German orphanage waited with a chartered plane to take them to Germany.

The children stopped for the night in a "secure" area in Fojnica, about 25 miles northwest of Sarajevo, said Anton Guenther Cromme, spokesman for the Saxony-Anhalt Social Ministry in Magdeburg, Germany.

On Saturday, two orphans were killed when the bus was hit by heavy fire.

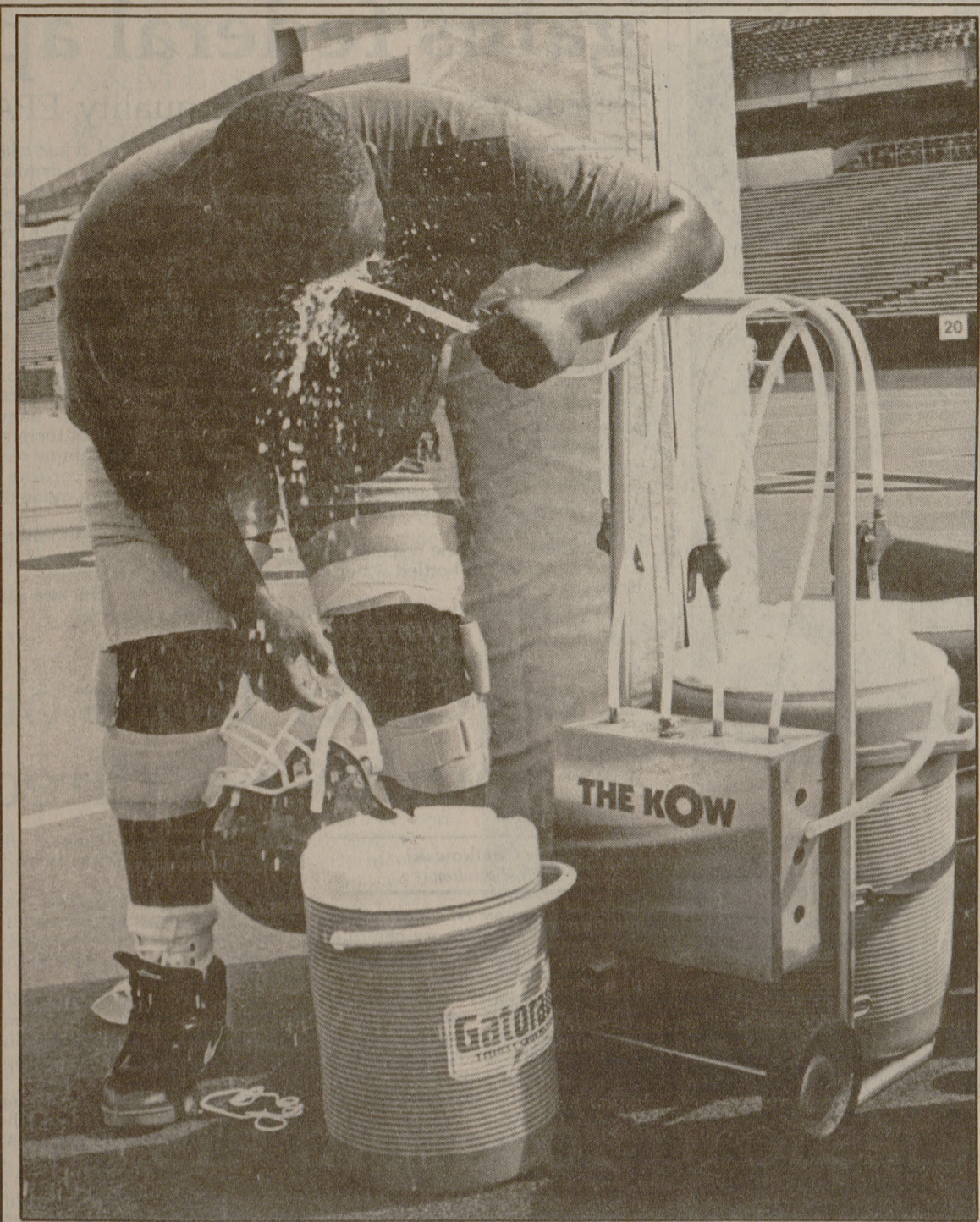
"I heard the glass shatter, then the bullet whistle past and then the gunshot," said bus driver Zeljko Grgic. "At first I wanted to throw myself to the floor, but then I remembered the kids were in the back and we had to make the last 200 to 300 meters to safety."

It was not immediately clear who fired on the bus or whether it was caught in cross-fire. Yugoslavia's premier, Milan Panic, condemned the attack. "Serbian, Bosnian... they are all terrorists," Panic said during a visit to Bulgaria on Sunday.

Bosnia's Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, denied his forces attacked the bus. "If the bus was properly marked and if nobody was firing from it, I guarantee that Serbian soldiers would not attack it," he said.

Bosnia is engaged in an increasingly desperate drive to cut ethnic Serb lines encircling the capital. An offensive by Bosnia's mostly Muslim government forces has concentrated on northwest Sarajevo, but the battle lines expanded Sunday.

Bosnian troops claimed it pushed back some Serb units, but it was unclear whether Serb lines were broken. Bosnian forces seek to sever Serb supply lines and connect with Muslim fighters outside the city.



NICK PENA/The Battalion

Take five

Incoming freshman recruit Calvin Collins, an offensive lineman from West Brook High School in Beaumont, cools off during an evening session of the freshmen two-a-day workout routine. See related story on Page 3.

Independent Croatia holds first elections

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP) — Voters on Sunday weighed hopes for peace and nationalist President Franjo Tudjman's claim to have fulfilled centuries-old dreams of statehood.

Croatians were voting — some in bombed out polling places or close to fighting in neighboring Bosnia — in their first general election since declaring independence last year. Polls showed Tudjman, running for re-election, slightly ahead in a field of eight.

"There is no doubt we will win," Tudjman, of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, said as he cast his ballot in Zagreb Sunday morning.

Tudjman, a former Communist general, was chosen president by the parliament after his party swept 205 of 356 seats in the elections in spring 1990.

Tudjman asserts that under his rule Croats finally gained statehood. They have won broad international

recognition as Yugoslavia disintegrated.

Opponents blame Tudjman for losing one-third of Croatia's territory to Serbian and U.N. control in a bloody war that has killed at least 10,000, devastated the country's economy and destroyed much of its cultural heritage.

"We expect these elections to bring us peace. We had enough bloodshed," Katica Balic, an elderly woman, said in Zagreb, the Croatian capital.

Besides the race for Croatia's first popularly elected president, more than 25 parties were competing for 120 seats in the parliament's lower house. Upper house elections will be held later.

More than 6,000 polling stations opened in Croatia at 7 a.m. (1 a.m. EDT) for 12 hours of voting. First unofficial results were expected Monday, but the final official tally was not expected before the end of the week.

Rival Kurds square off over tombstone

KALAR, Iraq (AP) — The deadliest so far of a growing number of clashes between rival Iraqi Kurdish groups was ignited by a fight over a tombstone.

After a two-day battle that left nearly a score or more dead — the two forces vary widely in their casualty counts — tensions Sunday remained at the trigger point between fundamentalist Muslim Kurds and one of the leftist groups bent on winning autonomy in northern Iraq from Saddam Hussein.

The leftist guerrillas of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan play down the feud. But the fundamentalists, eager to install Islamic law in northern Iraq, say they're ready, if necessary, to again attack their Marxist-leaning rivals.

Just as their ideologies differ radically, so did both sides' accounts of the battle that began Thursday and ended Friday.

Sparks began to fly when two PUK guerrillas approached a

training camp operated by the fundamentalist Islamic Movement of Kurdistan in hopes of obtaining a tombstone for one of their dead.

The fundamentalists, who have a monopoly on the tombstone supply in Kalar, a town of 70,000 people, insist that any non-fundamentalist seeking a marker show up with the body of the dead person and then go to a mosque to complete paperwork.

Apparently this arrangement was not to the leftists' liking. An

argument exploded into a shootout, in which Patriotic Union officials said the two guerrillas were killed.

The Patriotic Union then attacked a mosque and two other fundamentalist strongholds.

Kurdo Kasim, a ranking Patriotic Union official, taking a journalist on a tour of the area tour early Sunday, first insisted that his group suffered only two dead, and that they killed 27 fundamentalists.

Brush fires burn across 3,500 acres

2,000 firefighters battle blaze

MOCCASIN, Calif. (AP) — Their ranks bolstered by conquest over one blaze, firefighters on Sunday battled in steep terrain against flames that burned across more than 3,500 acres of brush and timber dried by six years of drought.

Smoke was so thick airplane crews could not make an accurate acreage reading, said David Ortegel of the California Department of Forestry, adding that as many as 4,000 acres were affected.

No injuries were reported, but a barn was destroyed and hundreds of homes were threatened. Rugged terrain hindered firefighters who also faced the unusual problem of hard-

day afternoon near 100 degrees. Whipped by gusty winds, the fire moved so fast on Saturday it burned 1,000 acres in an hour.

Ortegel said there was no estimated time for full containment of the blaze believed to have been sparked by a camp fire.

Meanwhile Sunday, more than 700 firefighters were called to a fire raging in mountainous west-central Idaho. The blaze was reported Friday and has blackened nearly 4,000 acres. Some campers and sightseers were evacuated.

It was believed to have been caused by lightning. The area is so steep and remote that firefighters had to hike in or were dropped in by helicopter. One suffered a broken pelvis jumping from a helicopter on Saturday.

"Fire is our biggest nightmare at the ranch, and now it's coming true."

—Stacy Kennedy, evacuee

About 100 firefighters who helped control a 425-acre blaze near Fricot, about 50 miles away, joined the fight against the larger fire, which forced the evacuation of 2,000 people, said Kathy Campbell, a state forestry spokeswoman.

The new contingent in California brought to 2,000 the number of people fighting the blaze. The fire burned in picturesque Sierra foothills country only four miles from Stanislaus National Forest and 20 miles outside of Yosemite National Park.

Improved weather during the night helped firefighters reach about 15 percent containment, Ortegel said.

"We got a little cooling, a little humidity," he said at a news conference Sunday.

Temperatures hovered Satur-

Iraq, Kuwait ignore invasion anniversary

UMM QASR, Iraq (AP) — Before the quick trip across this border town Sunday, the second anniversary of the Iraqi invasion, U.S. Marine Capt. Ralph Croce offered a flak jacket and a helmet in the light blue of United Nations peacekeepers.

"Don't you know these will stop anything? We're the U.N.," he said, grinning.

But there is no need for such battle props.

Where two years ago all the menace of the Iraqi military machine bore down on Kuwait, the wreckage of tanks now rusts in the 120-degree heat and paint chips off faded murals glorifying past battles.

The anniversary was virtually ignored, both here and in Kuwait City. Most conversations focused not on the past violence but on current tension, exemplified by last month's standoff between U.N. weapons inspectors and Iraqis who refused to let them enter a government building.

Kuwaiti newspaper editorials called for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's overthrow,

while the opposition said those at home responsible for the disaster should be held accountable.

State-run Baghdad radio and Iraqi newspapers used the anniversary to repeat the claim that Kuwait is Iraq's lost 19th province. They added that one day, Iraq would have it back.

Iraq has refused to recognize a new border drawn up by the United Nations that would give the southern half of Umm Qasr to Kuwait.

This port, which straddles the border, is nearly dead.

Only a few thousand of the 40,000 Iraqis who used to live here remain. They wade at U.N. jeeps passing in the distance; a high-level protest issued Saturday from Baghdad means the peacekeepers now are forbidden to talk with Iraqis.

The 260 peacekeepers and an almost equal number of support staff drawn from 33 nations have also been barred from trips to Baghdad because of security fears.

U.N. observers monitor protests in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — A national strike originally intended to force the white government from power starts Monday with several black groups opposing it and United Nations monitors trying to prevent violence.

The African National Congress and its labor allies called the two-day strike as part of protests against chronic township violence and a stalemate in political talks.

But the strike, marches and other protests scheduled for the next week have little chance of pressuring President F.W. de Klerk's government into major concessions on ending white minority rule.

The planned strike also has drawn attention to divisions among black groups and raised tension throughout the country.

An ANC leader was quoted Sunday as saying some of the group's supporters in black townships have killed political opponents.

The ANC broke off negotiations with the government in June after the massacre of more than 40 blacks in the Boipatong township south of Johannesburg, and launched a protest campaign.

But ANC President Nelson Mandela said during a television interview Sunday night that he was optimistic that his group's disputes with the government would be resolved.

"The clear picture that has emerged is one of hope," Mandela said. However, he criticized de Klerk for failing to act strongly to stop the violence.

"It gives the impression that because it is blacks being killed it is not a national crisis," he said.

The demonstrations leading up to Monday's strike have drawn small crowds, indicating general indifference and raising questions about how widely the national stayaway would be observed.

"From one perspective, this is the stayaway hardly anyone really wanted," the Star newspaper said in

an editorial last week. "So volatile is the climate that no one can guarantee a peaceful protest. Yet the paradox remains: once over, the way may well be cleared for a return to negotiation."

Political leaders have called for calm, noting that previous political strikes have sparked violence. Some 5,000 police were sent last week to strife-plagued black townships near Johannesburg.

Business leaders warn the stayaway will further damage an economy already in recession, but have agreed to a no work, no pay policy for strikers.

The ANC says its supporters have a right to protest peacefully and that any trouble will be started by political enemies.

But other black groups — including the rival Inkatha Freedom Party and some smaller, militant groups — oppose the strike.

Inkatha, locked in a power struggle with the ANC, says a strike only hurts workers and under-

mines political negotiations.

Leftist groups such as the Pan Africanist Congress initially supported the strike as an effort to force the government to resign, but now oppose it because they say the ANC's goal is only to resume negotiations.

A team of United Nations monitors arrived Sunday to try to help prevent violence. It came after U.N. special envoy Cyrus Vance completed a 10-day mission to assess what steps were needed to get political talks restarted.

More than 8,000 blacks have died in political violence since de Klerk took office and launched reforms aimed at ending apartheid. Police on Sunday reported 10 deaths in nationwide political violence, including eight black men killed in an attack on a squatter camp near Johannesburg.