

**Havel, Czech Anti-Communist, Dies At 75**

PRAGUE (AP) — The end of Czechoslovakia's totalitarian regime was called the Velvet Revolution because of how smooth the transition seemed: Communism dead in a matter of weeks, without a shot fired. But for Vaclav Havel, it was a moment he helped pay for with decades of suffering and struggle.

The dissident playwright spent years in jail but never lost his defiance, or his eloquence, and the government's attempts to crush his will ended up expanding his influence. He became a source of inspiration to Czechs, and to all of Eastern Europe. He went from prisoner to president in 1989, the year the Berlin Wall fell and communism crumbled across the region.

Havel died Sunday morning at his weekend home in the northern Czech Republic. The 75-year-old former chain-smoker had a history of chronic respiratory problems dating back to his time in prison.

Shy and bookish, with a wispy mustache and unkempt hair, Havel helped draw the world's attention to the anger and frustration spilling over behind the Iron Curtain. While he was president, the Czech Republic split from Slovakia, but it also made dramatic gains in economic might.

"His peaceful resistance shook the foundations of an empire, exposed the emptiness of a repressive ideology, and proved that moral leadership is more powerful than any weapon," said President Barack Obama. "He also embodied the aspirations of half a continent that had been cut off by the Iron Curtain, and helped unleash tides of history that led to a united and democratic Europe."

**Death Toll From Philippine Floods Hits 650**

ILIGAN, Philippines (AP) — As a storm that killed more than 650 in the southern Philippines raged outside the store where she works, Amor Limbago worriedly called home to check on her parents, but their cellphones just kept ringing and later went dead.

Limbago, 21, rushed home as soon as the flash floods receded and confirmed her worst fear: Her parents and seven other relatives were gone, swept away from their hut by the river. They had eagerly planned a small Christmas dinner in that hut just days earlier.

"I returned and saw that our house was completely gone," a weeping Limbago told The Associated Press from Cagayan de Oro city. "There was nothing but mud all over and knee-deep floodwaters."

Tropical Storm Washi blew away Sunday after devastating a wide swath of the mountainous region on Mindanao island, which is unaccustomed to major storms. It killed at least 652 people and left more than 900 others missing, the Philippine Red Cross said.

Most of the victims were asleep Friday night when flash floods cascaded down mountain slopes with logs and uprooted trees, swelling rivers. The late-season tropical storm turned the worst-hit coastal cities of Cagayan de Oro and nearby Iligan into muddy wastelands filled with overturned cars and broken trees.

**NYC Woman Set On Fire Owed Suspect \$2K**

NEW YORK (AP) — A man charged with dousing a woman in flammable liquid and tossing a Molotov cocktail on her in an elevator told police he set her on fire because he was angry that she owed him \$2,000, authorities said Sunday.

Jerome Isaac, of Brooklyn, was arrested Sunday on murder and arson charges in the death of 73-year-old Deloris Gillespie. The 47-year-old Isaac reeked of gasoline when he entered a police station overnight and implicated himself in Gillespie's death, New York Police Department spokesman Paul Browne said.

Gillespie was ambushed in the elevator of her Brooklyn apartment building on Saturday afternoon, Browne said. The suspect had been waiting for her when the elevator doors opened to the fifth floor of her building in Prospect Heights, police said.

"It was apparent he knew she was on the elevator," Browne said. After setting Gillespie ablaze, Isaac went to his apartment building just blocks away and set a fire there, Browne said. He then hid on a roof before turning himself in to police, Browne said.

**Egypt's Military, Activists Vie For Support**

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's ruling military and the revolutionaries who demand they immediately step down battled for a third day in the streets on Sunday — and competed fiercely for the support of a broader public that has grown tired of turmoil since the fall of Hosni Mubarak 10 months ago.

The generals appear to be winning the fight for the public, despite a heavy-handed crackdown on protesters around Cairo's Tahrir Square using a roughness that rivaled even that of Mubarak's widely hated police force.

Before dawn Monday, security forces mounted a charge and cleared hundreds of demonstrators away from the area, according to videos posted on the internet.

The protesters have tried to drum up Egyptians' anger at the military by spreading videos and photos of military police savagely beating young men and women to the ground with sticks and truncheons — and the resonant scene of a woman in a conservative headscarf being stripped half naked by soldiers who stomp on her chest.

But so far their efforts to win public sympathy don't seem to be gaining traction in the face of the military's campaign to depict the crowds of hundreds in the streets as hooligans and vandals, not the idealistic activists who succeeded in bringing down Mubarak. At least 10 protesters have been killed and 441 others wounded in the three days of violence, according to the Health Ministry.

"The military has failed in everything except for its stunning success in making people hate the revolution, its history and its revolutionaries," prominent columnist Ibrahim Eissa wrote in an editorial in the independent pro-revolution newspaper, Al-Tahrir.

**'Sherlock' Slips With \$40 Million Debut**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Sherlock Holmes is facing his worst enemy: declining crowds at theaters as this year's domestic movie attendance dips to the lowest in 16 years.

Robert Downey Jr.'s sequel "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows" debuted on top with a \$40 million weekend, off 36 percent from the first installment's \$62.3 million opening two years ago, according to studio estimates Sunday.

The first movie opened over Christmas weekend, one of the busiest times for movie theaters. Distributor Warner Bros. predicts the "Holmes" sequel, which pits Downey's detective against archrival Professor Moriarty, will make up the lost ground over the holidays.

The "Holmes" sequel opened in six overseas markets, including the detective's native Britain, and took in \$14.7 million to bring its worldwide total to \$54.7 million.

After two previous weekends that were Hollywood's worst of the year, overall business was down again, about 12 percent lower than the same weekend in 2010 as Hollywood struggles to interest audiences in its big year-end releases.

The 20th Century Fox family sequel "Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked" did even worse than "Holmes." "Chipwrecked" opened at No. 2 with \$23.5 million, about half the business the first two "Chipmunks" movies did on their debut weekends.

The studio had expected a bigger debut, but with schools shutting down for the holidays, Fox executives hope business will pick up.

Tom Cruise and Paramount had a spot of good news. Their action sequel "Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol" got off to a healthy start at No. 3 with a \$13 million weekend playing exclusively at huge-screen IMAX theaters and some other large-format cinemas.

"Ghost Protocol" goes into general release Wednesday.

The movie already has opened in 36 overseas markets, where it pulled in \$68.2 million, putting its global haul at more than \$80 million.

**Last U.S. Troops Exit Iraq**

BY REBECCA SANTANA  
Associated Press

AT THE IRAQ-KUWAIT BORDER — Outside it was pitch dark. The six American soldiers couldn't see much of the desert landscape streaming by outside the small windows of their armored vehicle. They were hushed and exhausted from an all-night drive — part of the last convoy of U.S. troops to leave Iraq during the final moment of a nearly nine-year war.

As dawn broke Sunday, a small cluster of Iraqi soldiers along the highway waved goodbye to the departing American troops.

"My heart goes out to the Iraqis," said Warrant Officer John Jewell. "The innocent always pay the bill."

When they finally crossed the sand berm that separates Iraq from Kuwait, illuminated by floodlights and crisscrossed with barbed wire, the mood inside Jewell's vehicle was subdued. No cheers. No hugs. Mostly just relief.

His comrade, Sgt. Ashley Vorhees, mustered a bit more excitement.

"I'm out of Iraq," she said. "It's all smooth sailing from here."

The final withdrawal was the starkest of contrasts to the start of the war, which began before dawn on March 20, 2003. That morning, an airstrike in southern Baghdad, where Saddam Hussein was believed to be hiding, marked the opening shot of the famed "shock and awe" bombardment. U.S. and allied ground forces then stormed from Kuwait toward the capital, hurtling north across southern Iraq's featureless deserts.

The last convoy of heavily armored personnel carriers, known as MRAPS, left the staging base at Camp Adder in southern Iraq in Sunday's early hours. They slipped out under cover of darkness and strict secrecy to prevent any final attacks. The 500 soldiers didn't even tell their Iraqi comrades on the base they were leaving.

The attack never materialized. The fear, though, spoke volumes about the country they left behind — shattered, still dangerous and containing a good number of people who still see Americans not as

**Last American To Die In Iraq War Was N.C. Soldier Killed By Bomb**

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP) — As the last U.S. troops withdrew from Iraq on Sunday, friends and family of the first and last American fighters killed in combat were cherishing their memories rather than dwelling on whether the war and their sacrifice was worth it.

Nearly 4,500 American fighters died before the last U.S. troops crossed the border into Kuwait. David Hickman, 23, of Greensboro was the last of those war casualties, killed in November by the kind of improvised bomb that was a signature weapon of this war.

"David Emanuel Hickman. Doesn't that name just bring out a smile to your face?" said Logan Trainum, one of Hickman's closest friends, at the funeral where the soldier was laid to rest after a ceremony in a Greensboro church packed with friends and family.

Trainum says he's not spending time asking why Hickman died: "There aren't enough facts available for me to have a defined opinion about things. I'm just sad, and pray that my best friend didn't lay down his life for nothing."

He'd rather remember who Hickman was: A cutup who liked to joke around with friends. A physical fitness fanatic who half-kiddingly called himself "Zeus" because he had a body that would make the gods jealous. A ferocious outside linebacker at Northeast Guilford High School who was the linchpin of a defense so complicated they had to scrap it after he graduated because no other teenager could figure it out.

the ally who helped them end Saddam's dictatorship, but as an enemy.

About 110 vehicles made the last trip from Camp Adder to the "berm" in Kuwait, the long mound of earth over which tens of thousands of American troops charged into Iraq at the start of the war.

The roughly five-hour drive was uneventful, with the exception of a few vehicle malfunctions.

Once they crossed into Kuwait, there was time for a brief celebration as the soldiers piled out of the cramped and formidable-looking MRAPs. A bear hug, some whooping, fist bumps and fist pumps.

The war that began eight years and nine months earlier cost nearly 4,500 American and well more than 100,000 Iraqi lives and \$800 billion from the U.S. Treasury. The bitterly divisive conflict left Iraq shattered and struggling to recover. For the United States, two central questions remain unanswered: whether it was all worth it, and whether the new government the Americans leave behind will remain a steadfast U.S. ally or drift into Iran's orbit.

But the last soldiers out were looking ahead, mostly, and not back. They spoke eagerly of await-

ing family reunions — some of them in time for Christmas — and longing for Western "civilization" and especially the meals that await them back home.

The 29-year-old Vorhees was planning a Mexican dinner out at Rosa's in Killeen, Texas. Her favorite is crispy chicken tacos. Another joy of home, she said: You don't have to bring your weapon when you go to the bathroom.

Spc. Jesse Jones was getting ready to make the 2 1/2 hour drive from Ft. Hood, Texas, where the brigade is based, to Dallas. His quarry: an In & Out Burger.

"It's just an honor to be able to

serve your country and say that you helped close out the war in Iraq," said Jones, 23, who volunteered to be in the last convoy. "Not a lot of people can say that they did huge things like that that will probably be in the history books."

President Barack Obama stopped short of calling the U.S. effort in Iraq a victory.

"I would describe our troops as having succeeded in the mission of giving to the Iraqis their country in a way that gives them a chance for a successful future," Obama said in an interview with ABC News' Barbara Walters, recorded Thursday.

Saddam and his regime fell within weeks of the invasion, and the dictator was captured by the end of the year — to be executed by Iraq's new Shiite rulers at the end of 2006. But Saddam's end only opened the door to years more of conflict as Iraq was plunged into a vicious sectarian war between its Shiite and Sunni communities. The near civil war devastated the country, and its legacy includes thousands of widows and orphans, a people deeply divided along sectarian lines and infrastructure that remains largely in ruins.

In the past two years, violence has dropped dramatically, and Iraqi security forces that U.S. troops struggled for years to train have improved. But the sectarian wounds remain unhealed. Even as U.S. troops were leaving, the main Sunni-backed political bloc announced Sunday it was suspending its participation in parliament to protest the monopoly on government posts by Shiite allies of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

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