

U.S. Targets Needy Bosnian Towns Where Food Is Running Low

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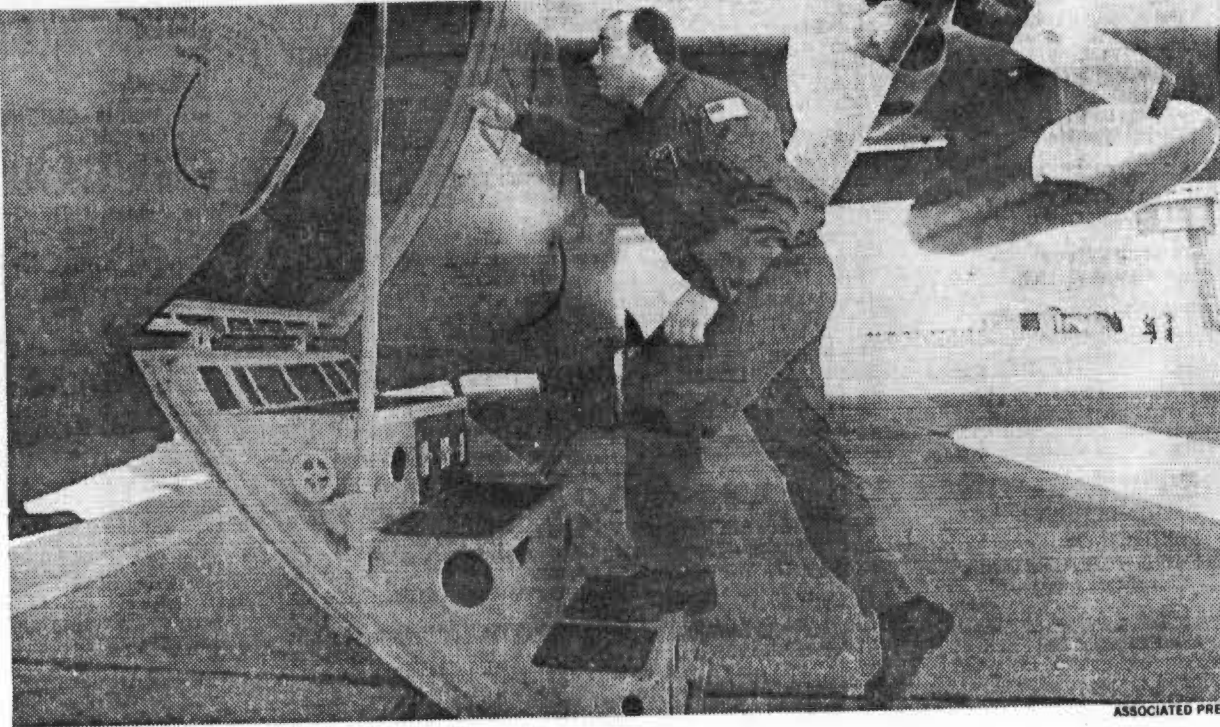
BELGRADE, Feb. 27—The likely targets of U.S. relief airdrops in eastern Bosnia are a patchwork of Serb-besieged Muslim enclaves suffering from varying degrees of misery.

This week the Serbs relented and let in food and medicine to two isolated communities—Zepa and Gorazde. But that was only after heavy pressure had been put on the Serbs, including reports of Washington's plans to parachute aid from the skies.

However, officials of the United Nations refugee agency said the Bosnian Serbs appeared in no mood to allow relief into the enclaves of Srebrenica, last resupplied on Dec. 10, or Cerska, which has received no outside food or medicine since the civil war began 10 months ago.

The Muslims in eastern Bosnia have launched a series of offensives to break out of their isolation and prevent the Serbs from "ethnically cleansing" the enclaves and forcing the population into exile. Two weeks ago, the Bosnian Serbs captured the Muslim enclave of Kamenica and forced the population to flee across the nearby border into Serbia.

Adding to the eastern Muslims' mood of desperation, Western dip-



ASSOCIATED PRESS



Left, a U.S. reservist heads to Germany for the aid airlift to war-torn Bosnia. Map above shows towns where first airdrops are likely.

lomats said, was the Bosnian Croats' decision more than a month ago to stop arms and ammunition deliveries from central Bosnia, where the two ostensible allies are fighting each other for control of territory.

Even in enclaves where relief supplies arrived this week for the first time in more than a month, the

situation was judged serious by aid workers.

In the enclave of Zepa, which is completely surrounded by Serbs, groups of hungry Muslim children and adults stationed along the long, winding mountain road leading down to the valley clapped and begged the U.N. convoy for food.

A U.N. relief worker, who de-

clined to be identified for fear of compromising future access to the enclaves, said "the hunger of those people trying to stop the convoy was dramatic."

So severe is the food shortage that everyone "had lost weight" since the previous visit in January, he said, and an old woman whom he visited at random showed him the

the valley are shelled and mortared every day and night by besieging Serbs who hold the crests of the surrounding mountains. Muslim forces occupy the valley and the mountain slopes.

What passes for the community's center—a mosque, a school and a clinic—is attacked so regularly that the authorities have closed the school for fear children would be killed or wounded.

Without electricity, their link to the outside world is a battery-powered radio recharged by a generator running off a mill on a tributary of the Drina River.

"They are determined to stay put on the land and resist ethnic cleansing," he said.

So, too, are the defenders of Gorazde, who welcomed their first relief convoy in five weeks to an enclave that Muslim troops had succeeded in considerably enlarging for its perhaps 80,000 inhabitants, thanks to an offensive launched in mid-December.

The town itself, which last summer was the scene of fighting along its main street, was no longer within Serb artillery range as had been the case in December, the aid official said.

Muslim authorities in Gorazde expressed confidence that relief

He said the 35,000 Muslims in

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Bosnians Await U.S. Airdrops

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could now be delivered without problem to Bare and Renovica, isolated villages almost 20 miles to the northwest, a relief worker said.

But even in Gorazde he got the impression, judging by the disappearance of farm animals, that the inhabitants were digging into their final reserves.

He said the authorities had stopped distributing relief to families and in the town itself were preparing food in a communal kitchen, limiting individuals to one meal every three days.

Bosnian Factions Inspect, Approve U.S. Aid Parcels

Associated Press

FRANKFURT, Feb. 27—Representatives of Bosnia's warring factions today inspected and approved aid parcels to be dropped by U.S. planes into Muslim enclaves isolated by fighting.

U.S. military officials would not say when the cargo planes would begin parachuting the food into Bosnia. Planes will first drop leaflets telling Bosnians that the aid is coming and asking Serbs besieging the enclaves not to fire on the relief aircraft.

The Bosnian representatives of Muslim, Croat and Serb factions voiced no objections after examining the food and medicine stacked on pallets at the Rhein-Main Air Base outside Frankfurt.

Most Aid Airdropped to Bosnia Seems to Have Missed Target Zone

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drop area but had not been seen.

"The airdrop was successful," Defense Secretary Les Aspin said in a statement, adding, "We can confirm that many of the bundles landed in clear areas within the identified drop zone" and "the other bundles landed in or near the drop zone, but we are unable to confirm exact landing points."

From the beginning, the Administration has acknowledged that the purpose of the airdrop was more political than humanitarian, and that the intervention was intended to bring the warring factions to the negotiating table.

Pentagon officials also chose to drop supplies from 10,000 feet, acknowledging that much of the food and medicine might not reach its destination. Today, however, United States officials seemed troubled by reports that only a small portion of the aid might be getting to those who need it.

The supplies were dropped by three C-130 transport planes flying from Rhein-Main Air Base in Frankfurt at night and buffeted by strong winds over the drop site. One Pentagon official said the target area was only about 1,000 feet by 2,000 feet.

No Ethnic Criteria

The operation is intended mainly for the estimated 200,000 Muslims whose villages are under siege by Serbian nationalist forces, but United States officials, anxious to avoid the appearance of partiality, say they want to supply Bosnian civilians of all ethnic backgrounds.

Officers directing the operation declined to say when more supplies would be dropped. The airdrops are expected to continue on an almost nightly basis, with three to five planes in each mission.

A military spokesman, acknowledging the problems, said: "Some may have fallen on the Serb side, and some

In Washington, 'a success,' in Bosnia, questions.

may have gone to previously Muslim areas that were just captured by the Serbs. Some may have gone into the mountains or places people can't get to.

"What would be ideal is if we could get a call from someone in Bosnia who would tell us, 'I'm eating one of your meals and it tastes good.' So far we haven't heard anything like that."

The Target, the Cargo

Although United States and United Nations officials at first refused to say where the supplies had been dropped, several said later that the three planes were aiming at Cerska.

Reports from Cerska said no aid was received there. A radio operator there speculated that flight crews might have been misled by fires in a Serbian-controlled zone.

"Houses were burning in some of the recently captured territory," said the operator, who is known as Edin. "Maybe they thought it was a signal to drop there."

Military spokesmen in Frankfurt said the planes dropped a total of three 760-pound crates of medicine, mostly first-aid items like gauze and bandages, and 27 crates of food. The food crates, 1,550 pounds each, contained a total of 20,736 prepared meals.

Even before the mission, current and former Pentagon officials cautioned that all supplies might not be delivered. The standard procedure for an accurate airdrop is to do it at low altitude, in daylight, with spotters on the ground; the Bosnian airdrop failed on all three counts.

But Gen. Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, insisted that the airdrops be carried out at high altitude to minimize the risk to the crews from anti-aircraft weapons. The Pentagon acknowledges that accuracy is thus diminished.

United Nations peacekeeping troops, who face considerable personal risk, are from NATO countries.

Muted Hopes

Few analysts expect the airdrops to alter the balance of power in the Balkans, or even to feed large numbers of people. They say that even if they are successful, they will not help Bosnia's besieged and displaced Muslims.

"The delivery of large amounts of food does not change the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina," said the Prague newspaper Mlada Fronta. "Politicians are still not able to answer the most important question, which is whether the Muslims will be able to

survive anywhere.

"It requires only a normal amount of cynicism to realize that within a certain time, we will see thousands more Bosnians forced from their homes as a result of ethnic cleansing," the paper continued. "But now they will have full stomachs and American chewing gum in their pockets."

Serbs Are Silent

Special to The New York Times

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia, March 1 — The United States airdrop of relief supplies in eastern Bosnia signaled a

new phase of international involvement in the Balkan war. But the Serbian leadership, which has been blamed for the worst of the violence, let the step pass without comment.

The Government-controlled television reported on the mission and quoted European newspapers warning of the possible dangers, but there was no official comment from the President of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic.

"I think people generally understand the move as a sign of growing American military involvement," said Predrag Simic, director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics which is close to the Yugoslav federal

Government.

"I doubt whether the aid will have much practical effect," he said. "But it could have the effect of dragging the Americans into further fighting. All three sides have reason to try to shoot down a plane because whoever actually did it, the Serbs would be blamed."

Svetozar Stojanovic, a foreign policy adviser to Dobrica Cosic, the President of Yugoslavia, said Mr. Cosic had asked Army commanders not to fire at the C-130 cargo planes.

"The Americans said they couldn't be 100 percent sure there might not be incursions into our territory," Mr. Stojanovic said, "but why should we fire on our former allies?"

None of the three planes, which flew at high altitude, was fired at, despite heavy ground fighting in the area.



The New York Times

Supplies landed near Serbian forces besieging Cerska.

Praise From Europeans

Despite the uncertainties, many European politicians and commentators today praised the airdrop. But in some capitals, including London and Paris, praise was mixed with suggestions that the operation was aimed as much at publicity as at assistance to hard-pressed civilians.

"The British and other Europeans are wrong to be quite so snippy about the exercise," said The Independent, a leading British daily, in an editorial. "The effort will have value if some people are fed who would otherwise have starved."

Several newspapers said Washington was taking the lead because Europe had failed to do so.

"Although one can argue about the long-term value of this relief operation, it is clear that the phase of helplessly lamenting the death and starvation of human beings is over," said one of Germany's largest newspapers, Die Welt, in a front-page commentary. "The American action came not a day too soon. It puts western Europe to shame."

Germany praised the operation, and according to senior German officials, Bonn may decide as early as Wednesday to offer direct support.

The French Foreign Minister, Roland Dumas, defended European governments against charges of inaction.

"It's a good thing the Americans have joined the Europeans in an affair that interests the whole world," Mr. Dumas said in a radio interview. "Bravo! The Americans have come to lend a hand. But let's not forget what the Europeans are doing." Many of the