US helicopters sink three Iranian boats

The Pentagon reported that US helicopter gunships sank three Iranian patrol boats in the Persian Gulf yesterday after an American observation helicopter was fired upon without provocation.

It was the second American military engagement in the region since the United States began escorting reflagged Kuwaiti vessels through the Gulf. Officials say there were no American casualties. At least six Iranian crewmen survived the assault and were picked up by a US patrol boat.

Pentagon spokesman Fred Hoffman said the incident began when a lone US observation helicopter approached three or four Iranian patrol boats in international waters southwest of Farsi Island. He said the US helicopter did nothing provocative and suddenly found itself under fire. The observation helicopter radioed for help from nearby US helicopter gunships, which opened fire, sinking three Iranian gunboats. A fourth boat apparently escaped.

Earlier this week, US intelligence agencies had alerted American military forces to a build-up in the number of Iranian gunboats. A fourth boat apparently escaped.

Falwell quits PTL post

TV evangelist Jerry Falwell said it would take a "miracle of God" to keep Jim Bakker from coming back in six months as head of PTL. And Falwell does not sound like he expects a miracle. He called television ministry's board, and its top officers resigned this morning. The leaves- a federal bankruptcy judge's decision to let PTL's creditors and contributers a competing financial reorganization plan. Falwell said that clears the way for Bakker to return.

Falwell took over the ministry after Bakker resigned in a sex scandal, and ran it while reports of mismanagement under Bakker unfolded. Falwell said he and his associates cannot sit on a board that- in his word - "could have the slightest potential for the return of Jim Bakker to continue the PTL travesty of the past."

Dukakis names new campaign manager

Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis has named Harvard Law Professor Susan Estrich his new presidential campaign manager. She succeeds John Sasso, who resigned last week after admitting he distributed the videotape showing that sex. Joseph Biden had used the speech of British Labourite Neil Kinnock. The Delaware Democrat fired his presidential campaign.

Estrich had been the deputy Dukakis campaign manager. Dukakis told a news conference at the Lafayette Hotel that Estrich has the political, managerial, and leadership skills to lead his campaign. Estrich previously worked for Walter Mondale's presidential campaign in 1984 and the next year was co-chair of a Democratic Party campaign board charged with finding out what concerned Democrats about the party's rules and procedures. She still is a member of the party's national

The Big Chill

If you thought last night was chilly, just wait until Monday morning. A large cold area of high pressure in southwestern Canada is headed our way for late in the weekend. Ahead of this feature, winds will be turning northwesterly, thus making Saturday the last "warm" day in many to come.

Former TV evangelist Pat Robertson says he expected it to come out when he ran for president. And it did - The Wall Street Journal says Robertson's first son conceived during a spiritual journey to Israel several months before Robertson got married. However, Robertson told the Washington Post that he and his wife felt their marriage began at the moment of conception, and the Republican presidential candidate says his conduct before marriage took place before he dedicated his life to Jesus.

Robertson has been campaigning in Iowa, where he spoke about a hearing that took place Tuesday in Washington. A House panel was looking into the tax-exempt status of TV ministries, and Robertson said that has a chilling effect on freedom of religion.