

By Cesar G. Soriano
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A rock concert on the grounds of the Washington Monument ended abruptly yesterday afternoon when dozens of people pelted U.S. Park Police officers with rocks and beer bottles.

More than 10,000 people showed up for a free lunch-time concert by the Cranberries, an Irish pop group. Thousands had lined up along the grassy banks of the outdoor amphitheater before noon, when the acoustic show was scheduled to begin.

Many brought coolers and passed the time by playing Frisbee or other games in the hot midday sun. Some brought children, others, briefcases.

But the show did not start until nearly 12:30 p.m., when a warmup band stepped onto the stage of the Sylvan Theater. Many, expecting to see the Cranberries, boomed.

The Cranberries, known for their melodic brand of rock, did not take the stage until nearly 1 p.m. They played one song, then, halfway through their second, fans tried to climb onto the stage, prompting the band to stop.

Only five Park Police officers were on hand to control the crowd, and none was posted in front of the stage.

After the band stopped in the middle of its hit song "Linger," an announcer asked concertgoers to "take two giant steps back" and said the concert would resume as soon as it did. Many obeyed, but the concert did not resume.

When the announcer returned about five minutes later, he said the Cranberries "have already left." Much of what he said next was drowned out by booing, but he added: "Police don't believe this is a safe situation. Please disperse safely."

That's when the situation got out of hand.

The crowd quickly became rowdy — some throwing trash at the officers on the stage, others yelling obscenities and encouraging the police bashers. Some jumped onto the stage and an adjacent platform: One stole a band member's custom guitar. Others dove off the stage and attempted to "crowd surf."

More Park Police officers were immediately called in from a Law Enforcement Memorial event taking place on the Mall near Third Street. Dozens of mounted horse patrols and foot officers established a perimeter and cleared the south quarter of the Washington Monument grounds as a helicopter circled overhead.

Park Police spokesman Maj. Robert Hines reported one arrest for disorderly conduct and three injuries. Details of the injuries were not available.

"The crowd was larger than either the Park Police or we expected," said Alan Hay, general manager of radio station WHFS (99.1 FM), which sponsored the event. "We do free shows on a regular basis when it's warm

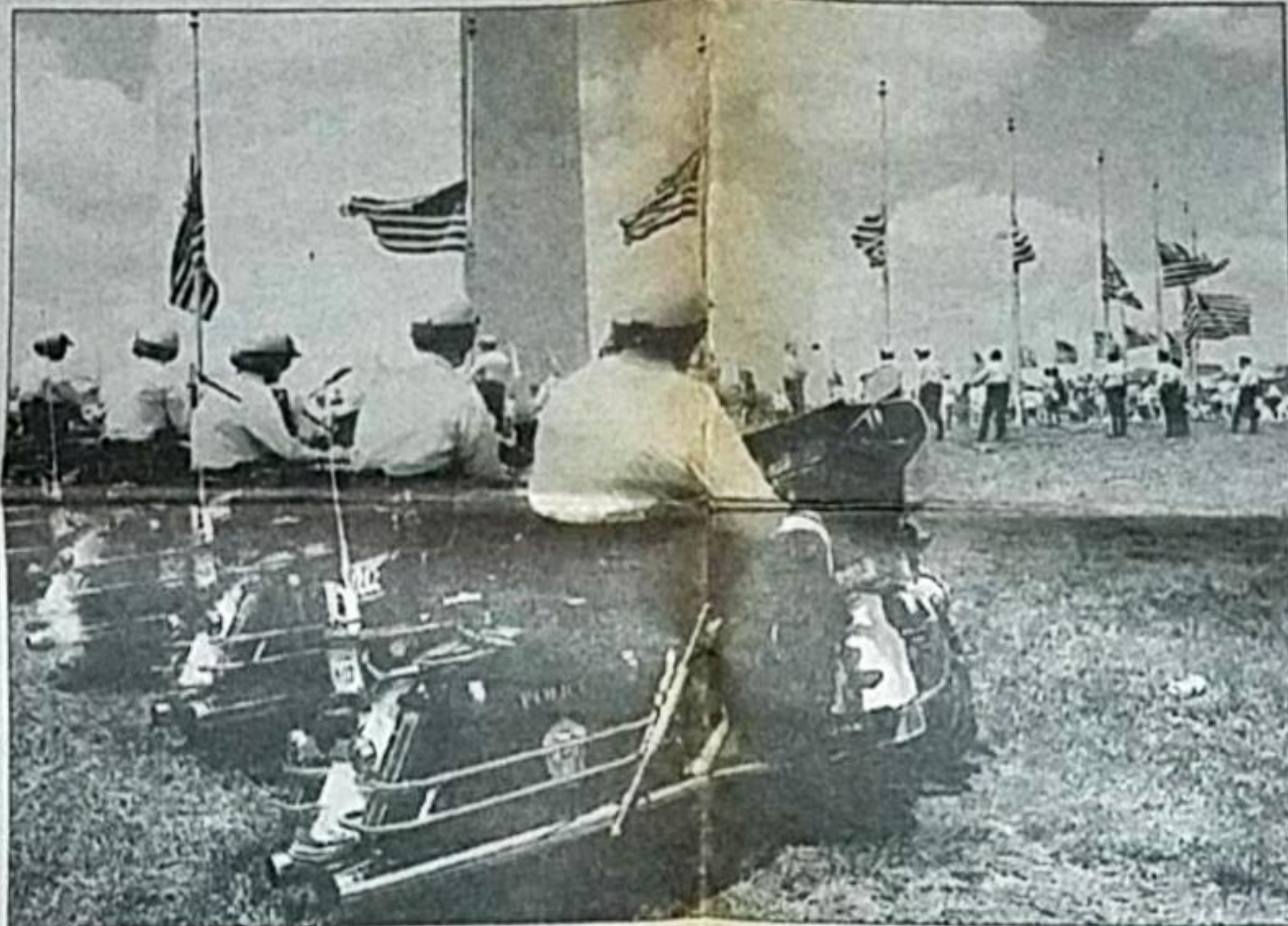


Photo by Kevin T. Gilbert/The Washington Times

Police watch the crowd leave after a rock-throwing incident at the Washington Monument yesterday.

Concert crowd hits police with rocks

5 officers unable to control thousands

outside, and there was no reason to believe the crowd was going to be larger than it normally was."

But other shows in the past have been at smaller venues, such as McPherson Square and Lafayette Park. And none have featured a band as hot as the Cranberries, whose latest album, "No Need to Argue," is in the Billboard Top 20.

The radio station was expecting only 3,000 and had paid for the use of five Park Police officers to control the crowd, Maj. Hines said.

But Maj. Hines said the concert was stopped about 1 p.m. because the band's reserved time for the event had expired. "The concert ended at the scheduled time," but because the band was 40 minutes late, it was only able to perform for about 10 minutes.

Mr. Hay said the radio station was unhappy the event was called off. "We would have liked the opportunity to calm the crowd down, but the Park Police determined it was time to shut down barely into the second song."

Concertgoers had mixed feelings about the incident.

"We're for having a rollicking good time as anybody else, but you've got to know when to stop," said Louis Lucchetti, a stockbroker who was attending the concert during his lunch break with



Rolling Stone

The Cranberries, an Irish pop group, finished only one song.

co-worker Andy Poulos.

"People are the ones who ruined it, not the police," said Shannon Currence of Takoma Park. "People were smoking [marijuana], freaking out and moshing. Everyone's so quick to blame [the police] when it was [the rioters]," she said.

Other fans were not so apologetic and suggested there were manhandling incidents by police. Mounted police officers used their horses to push the crowds back, knocking down people in the process. Other officers shoved people to clear the area.

"One guy was giving a cop lip, and he shoved the guy to the

ground," said Tempella Reynolds, who was near the front of the stage. "When some guys threatened to report him, another cop on a horse yelled 'You ain't nothing,'" said the University of Maryland student.

Park Police could not confirm the incident and said they had received no complaints as of yesterday afternoon.

Mr. Hay said the radio station will be re-evaluating security measures for future concerts.

"We do feel badly about the listeners who worked so hard to get to the show." He also said the band wants its guitar back. "There is a reward being offered by the Cranberries for that guitar."

Briefly

Judge considering foster care takeover

U.S. District Judge Thomas Hogan said he may put the city's troubled foster care system into receivership at a hearing next week, adding he is "deeply disturbed" by persistent problems in the Department of Human Services.

The problems include too few foster care homes and long waits to place children, resulting in children sleeping in the agency's administrative offices.

Judge Hogan also cited the February death of an abused 3-year-old, whose home was monitored by DHS, as evidence that the city is not adequately protecting its charges. "The bottom line is the children are not being served as they should be," he said.

The city's foster care system was placed in limited receivership in 1991.

First lady backs home for adoption babies

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton invited Mayor Marion Barry and D.C. church and community leaders to the White House yesterday for a briefing on a new home on Western Avenue for babies awaiting adoption.

The home, being built by nuns of the Missionaries of Charity, is for newborn children whose mothers have given them up for adoption, said Lisa Caputo, Mrs. Clinton's spokeswoman.

The home is expected to be blessed in June. Mrs. Clinton got involved in the project last year when Mother Theresa approached her and asked her backing for the project.

Barry not concerned by fiscal board delays

Mayor Marion Barry said his visit to the White House yesterday did not include a discussion with Clinton administration officials about members of the D.C. financial control board.

Mr. Barry told reporters outside the White House he is not concerned that the 25-day timeframe to name the five board members had passed with no appointments. He said the deadline in the legislation passed by Congress and signed by President Clinton was always a goal and not a mandate.

A spokesman for the Office of Management and Budget said the president has signed off on a list of more than five candidates, who are undergoing background checks. He said appointments are expected by the end of the month.