

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Ryans found guilty in Rulo murder

By Rick Warner
The Associated Press

OMAHA — A jury Thursday found cult leader Michael Ryan guilty of first-degree murder and his 16-year-old son guilty of second-degree murder in the torture slaying of a cult member.

Ryan, 37, and his son, Dennis, were convicted in the death last April of James Thimm, 26, at the survivalist cult's farm in southeast Nebraska. Defense attorneys claimed the Ryans were insane at the time of the killing.

The Ryans stood silent as the verdicts were read at 11:35 a.m. After sitting down, Dennis Ryan held his head in his hands and cried for several minutes.

The youth "just kept repeating that he couldn't believe it," said his attorney, Rodney Rehm.

"He's a boy and he's sad and the realization of what's going to happen just hit him," Rehm said.

Sixty people, including Thimm's foster parents and seven sheriff's deputies, were in the court-

room when the one-man, 11-woman jury returned its verdicts.

Jurors began deliberating Tuesday morning after 18 days of testimony in Douglas County District Court. The trial was moved from Richardson County because of publicity about the case.

Judge Robert Finn scheduled a May 8 sentencing hearing for Michael Ryan and a May 9 hearing for Dennis Ryan. Michael Ryan could be sentenced to death or life in prison. Dennis Ryan could be sentenced to 10 years to life in prison.

Asked his reaction to the verdict, Rehm said: "I wouldn't be surprised by anything in this case."

Michael Ryan's attorney, Richard Goos, said his client had to defend himself against a lot of crimes irrelevant to the murder charge.

"I'm very sad because Mike Ryan is a very sick person and now he stands a chance of being executed," Goos said.

Goos said he'll file a motion for a new trial. Rehm declined to say whether he'll appeal.

Prosecutor Randall Rehmeier said he wasn't surprised by the jury's decision.

"We're extremely happy with the verdict," he said. "Obviously the first-degree is what we wanted, and the second-degree is understandable in light of all the facts in the case."

Jurors could have found the Ryans guilty of first-degree murder, second-degree murder or manslaughter. They also could have returned a verdict of innocent, or not responsible by reason of insanity.

Thimm's body was found in an unmarked grave last August when authorities raided the farm near Rulo for the second time. Authorities said Thimm was whipped, shot in the fingers, probed in the rectum with a shovel handle and partially skinned before he died.

The Ryans and three former cult members admitted that they tortured Thimm, but disagreed about who was responsible for his death.

James Haverkamp, Timothy Haverkamp and John David Andreas were allowed to plead guilty

to reduced charges in exchange for their testimony against the Ryans.

Authorities said Michael Ryan led a group of about 20 adults and children on the farm near Rulo in 1984-85. The group hated Jews, believed in a God named Yahweh and stored food, clothing and weapons to prepare for a final battle between good and evil.

Ryan and others at the farm were influenced by James Wickstrom, a preacher who attacks Jews, blacks and other minorities. Audiotapes made by Wickstrom and other right-wing extremists were found at the Rulo farm.

Former cultists said life at the farm revolved around the use of an "arm test," in which one person would apply pressure on the arm of another person.

Cult members believed the test allowed them to communicate with Yahweh. Witnesses said the test was used to guide every aspect of the cult's activities, including routine matters such as what to wear and eat.

House passes gun bill against police lobbying

WASHINGTON — The House voted overwhelmingly Thursday to weaken the gun control law passed in the aftermath of the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., but retained a ban on interstate handgun sales.

The vote came after hundreds of uniformed policemen roamed the Capitol as lobbyists.

The key vote was 286-136 and the House followed with a 292-130 tally to formally send the legislation to the Senate.

For weeks, the legislation produced high drama, climaxing with police from 21 states arriving in uniform to con-

front the experienced lobbying teams from the National Rifle Association and allied groups.

In the end, both sides can claim victory on the bill sponsored by Rep. Harold L. Volkmer, D-Mo. — but the gun lobby more so.

NRA chief lobbyist Wayne LaPierre pointed to the bill's lifting of an interstate sales ban for rifles and shotguns and federal guarantees that all lawfully held weapons can be taken — unloaded and inaccessible — across state lines.

The NRA also approves, he said, of provisions that would make it more difficult to prosecute unintentional gun law violations, allow dealers to transfer guns from inventories to their private collections, and force the government to return seized weapons after an acquittal.

Hubert Williams, president of the Police Foundation, commented after the vote, "The core of the Volkmer bill was interstate sales, and they lost on that one. There are still many defects. On the whole, it is bad legislation."

Setting it Straight

An article titled "Clinic supply the pill to students at discount rates," (Daily Nebraskan, April 10) should have said one of the pill's positive side effects was reducing the risk of breast disease, not malignant. Mary Lou Golon's name was also misspelled.

In Brief

Brazil flood

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil — Tropical rainstorms have flooded the homes of 121,000 people in the northeastern states of Maranhao and Ceara, officials said Thursday. Francisco Albuquerque of the Maranhao Interior Department said by telephone that heavy rainfall since late February had driven at least 81,000 people from their homes and overflowing rivers had blocked roads and bridges. In neighboring Ceara, Ines Prata of the state Interior Department said by telephone that about 40,000 people were homeless.

'Sportaid'

UNITED NATIONS — Rock star Bob Geldof on Thursday announced his African aid group will sponsor "Sportaid" next month, designed to be "the biggest mass sports participation in the history of the world." Geldof, appeared at a news conference with James Grant, director

of UNICEF, which will co-sponsor the effort to raise funds for African relief.

Geldof said runners in Ethiopia and the Sudan will start May 17 and other runners are expected to reach New York May 25 where they will light a torch at the United Nations May 25.

At that moment, "the world will begin running," the Irish musician said.

Radon tests

LINCOLN — State Health Department officials are completing a survey of the prevalence of a cancer-causing radioactive gas in Nebraska homes, although they say the situation doesn't appear to be an immediate problem.

State and federal officials say high concentrations of radon gas in building materials cause lung cancer.

"We didn't find anything where something needed to be done im-

mediately," said Harry Borchert, director of the division of radiological health. "It looks like we're going to have to do some follow-up collection."

Urich won't buy truck

TECUMSEH, — Actor Robert Urich won't purchase a new truck from a Tecumseh auto dealer after all, said a spokesman for ABC-TV in Los Angeles.

Spokesman Bill Wilkens said Thursday that Urich had changed his mind and is not buying a new Chevrolet Suburban from Tecumseh car dealer Don Brinkman. Brinkman said the star of the television series "Spencer: For Hire," changed his mind late Wednesday and canceled his order.

Urich has been in this community of about 1,900 residents since March 31 filming parts of the ABC-TV miniseries "Amerika."

Second carrier sent to Mediterranean

WASHINGTON — The Navy dispatched a second aircraft carrier to sea in the Mediterranean Thursday, but sources said the Pentagon had yet to order a military strike against Libya in retaliation for recent terrorist attacks.

Should such orders be issued, however, the Navy is in position to form a two-carrier battle group that would include 16 combat ships and more than

160 airplanes, the sources said. It would take about two days to move such a battle group to the Libyan coast, said the sources who discussed the situation only on the ground they not be identified publicly.

The Pentagon officially declined comment on the position of the Navy ships. But officials who requested anonymity said the carrier Coral Sea — its

orders to return home canceled — had departed port in Malaga, Spain, early in the day Thursday.

The Coral Sea had been scheduled to depart Malaga for the Atlantic Ocean and home, having completed a standard 6-month deployment that began Oct. 2. But the Pentagon confirmed Wednesday night that those orders had

been scuttled for "an indefinite period."

Military commanders say they must have at least two carriers in the Mediterranean to support any military operation against Libya, the sources said.

The president refused Wednesday to say what he plans to do. But the United States is "not going to just sit here and hold still," Reagan said.

Senators urge Reagan to retain SALT II

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan group of 52 senators urged President Reagan on Thursday to maintain the unratified SALT II arms control treaty, even if it means scrapping two nuclear submarines next month.

"We believe that discarding the SALT limits will endanger U.S. and NATO security by allowing the Soviets to add thousands of new warheads to their arsenal," said a letter to Reagan signed by 38 Democrats and 14 Republicans.

But an informed administration source said most of Reagan's advisers

are urging him to break through the treaty limits on long-range missiles when a new Trident missile submarine, the USS Nevada, begins sea trials about May 20. The president's chief option for staying within the missile limit is to dismantle two existing Poseidon submarines.

The Trident has 24 missile launchers, the Poseidon, 16.

Reagan said at his new conference Wednesday night that he had not made up his mind on SALT II. Although the 1979 treaty was never ratified, the pres-

ident has said the United States would respect it if Moscow did — a policy known as "no undercut."

The issue of Soviet violations of SALT II is critical to the decision, all sides agree. Reagan told reporters he wants to study reports of Soviet violations. Alleged violations include secretive coding of test data and the deployment of two new missile systems, rather than the one allowed by the treaty.

Although the 52 senators said in their letter that the "legitimate concerns" about the violations should be

pursued, they evidently did not conclude they were serious enough to warrant scrapping the agreement.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said at a news conference at which the letter was released that "none of the alleged violations, either alone or collectively, were really militarily significant."

The letter argued that "it is important that some restraints continue in place on the Soviet Union and the United States on an interim basis while negotiations continue in Geneva to reach a new arms agreement."

Panel calls for changes in teaching field

WASHINGTON — A private blue-ribbon panel including the heads of the two major teacher unions will call for drastic changes in the education, certification and pay of schoolteachers.

A draft of the final report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy calls for abolishing the bachelor's degree in education and conducting all professional teacher education at the graduate level.

It also endorses creation of a National Board of Professional Teaching Standards to grant teaching certificates to

those who pass stiff tests, regardless of whether they had taken any education courses.

Teachers would still have to obtain licenses from states, but a board-certified teacher would have prestige and extra earnings power, akin to the board certification process for physicians.

It recommends that top teachers with advanced certificates be paid up to \$65,000 a year for 12 months work — almost triple the current average salary for teachers of \$23,564.

Teachers' pay should be based on their level of responsibility, competence, seniority and productivity, not by how many graduate credits they pile up after becoming a teacher, it said. "Compensation should be based on proven competence, not time in the seat."

The Associated Press obtained a draft copy of the 74-page report, "Shaping Our Future: Teachers in America," scheduled for formal release next month.

The report states that "if our stand-

ard of living is not to fall steadily in the years ahead, if the underclass is not to continue its steady growth, if our democracy is to function effectively into the next century, our schools must graduate the vast majority of their students with achievement levels long thought possible for only the privileged few."

"Everything depends on the teachers ...," it said. "But the challenge comes at a particularly bad time. The competence of our schoolteachers will surely decline in the next few years if current trends continue."

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