

Two held for hijacking may be innocent

The plane's co-pilot said the suspects were not the hijackers; the culprits died in the crash.

MORONI, Comoros Islands (AP) — Two men held for hijacking an Ethiopian Airlines plane that crashed, killing more than 120 people, may have been innocent passengers and could be released, the government said Monday.

The two were arrested at a hospital Saturday but government spokesman Dgouma Ibrahim said when the suspects were shown to the plane's co-pilot, he told police they weren't the hijackers.

Ibrahim said the men could be set free as early as Tuesday if authorities determine the flight officer, Yonas Mekuria, is correct.

If the two arrested men are determined not to have been Ethiopian hijackers as was previously thought, and

instead were passengers from Congo and Djibouti, it would mean all three hijackers died in Saturday's crash just off the Comoros Islands, Ibrahim added.

Early Monday, recovery workers dragged a large section of the wreckage of the hijacked jet out of the azure waters of this beach resort.

Ethiopian Airlines said today that four of the 52 people pulled alive from the wreckage have died, raising the death toll to 127. The survivors include the pilot.

Flight 961, which left the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa en route to the Ivory Coast, crash-landed in the Indian Ocean on Saturday. It was one of history's deadliest air hijackings.

The motive behind the hijacking remains unclear.

The two men were arrested at the central Moroni hospital, where survivors of the crash were initially taken. They remained in police custody Monday.

A third hijacker died in the crash, and officials have identified his body, Ibrahim said. His identity has not been disclosed.

The remains of some of the victims could be seen in the section of fuselage pulled onto the beach. Workers wore masks to fend off the smell in the tropical heat. Recovered bodies were zipped into dark bags and hauled to a makeshift morgue set up in a former meat warehouse.

Police said 101 bodies had been recovered by late Monday.

Survivors have been flown to hospitals across the region, including 25 who were taken to Nairobi, Kenya. Ethiopian Airlines did not specify where the four who had died had been taken.

The three hijackers who stormed into the cockpit soon after the plane took off had demanded they be taken to Australia and refused to allow the pilot to stop to refuel.

As the Boeing 767's fuel tanks

"The first bump was really gentle. Then the second one was really hard. The third one was even harder, like a 70-mph auto accident. The last one was like an earthquake."

FRANK HUDDLE

Passenger, the U.S. consul-general in Bombay

emptied, the pilot, Capt. Leul Abate, pleaded with the hijackers to let him land the jet safely at an airport in Moroni, capital of the Comoros Islands east of Mozambique.

"He wanted to go there, but they wouldn't let him," the co-pilot Mekuria told The Associated Press from his hospital bed, where he was being

treated for cuts and bruises. "I guess they understood it," he said of the fuel shortage. "But they didn't give a damn."

Armed with an ax, a fire extinguisher and a device they claimed was a bomb, they had pushed past flight attendants and into the cockpit, beating the co-pilot and forcing him out.

One crewman rescued after plane crash

ARCATA, Calif. (AP) — After turning up nothing by Sunday night, the Coast Guard and Air Force called off their searches indefinitely for eight crewmen and wreckage still missing from a military plane that crashed at sea.

Only one survivor from the Air Force Reserve plane has been pulled from the chilly Pacific Ocean waters, and two bodies have been recovered.

Two Coast Guard cutters kept watch on debris, including a wing section floating on the water's surface. Crews were expected to salvage it Monday, Petty Officer Lars Hollis said.

Earlier, officials said they didn't expect to find any survivors.

"We have officially changed the nature of the mission from a search-and-rescue mission to a search-and-recovery mission," said Air Force Reserve Col. Gene Garton, vice wing commander of the 304th Rescue Squadron in Portland, Ore.

Coast Guard and Air Force aircraft flew over the site of Friday's crash off the northern California coast, and two Coast Guard cutters and a Navy frigate cruised the area searching and picking up floating wreckage.

The crashed plane, a four-engine

HC-130 from the Oregon unit, was flying a training mission when the crew reported engine problems and total electronic failure.

Two hours after the distress call, a Coast Guard helicopter located the crash site 40 miles off Point Mendocino.

Under the light of a full moon, Tech. Sgt. Robert Vogel of Albany, Ore., was spotted wearing a survival suit and clinging to a floating seat cushion in the 52-degree water.

Vogel was in fair condition Sunday at a hospital in Arcata, where Air Force investigators went to interview him. He

suffered injuries to his hip, ankle and face.

Vogel recalled the loud sounds of the helicopter heading to rescue him.

"It was very noisy," Vogel told The Oregonian. "But it was the sweetest sound I've ever heard."

To his professors at Oregon State University, where he is a senior in engineering, Vogel said, "I won't be taking midterms on Wednesday."

He had a poignant message to the men with whom he flew: "They were a fantastic crew." Vogel said. "I wish they were here."

Vogel, a radioman on the aircraft,

may have survived because the plane broke apart around him. Garton said the radioman's seat would be against a major bulkhead at the rear of the flight deck. Also stationed on the flight deck are the pilot, co-pilot, navigator and flight engineer.

All 11 of those aboard the plane were from Oregon or southwestern Washington.

At the Portland Air Base, where the squadron was based, a critical incident stress team met Sunday to plan assistance for the victims' families and fellow reservists.

Fraud found at hospitals

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Federal authorities say they have found Medicare overcharges at 4,660 hospitals nationwide, and they expect the government to collect \$120 million in penalties.

The U.S. Justice Department already has reached settlements with nearly 1,000 hospitals, resulting in payments of \$22 million, according to U.S. Attorney David Barasch, who oversees the investigation from Harrisburg.

The Philadelphia Inquirer on Sunday said the settlements have been conducted secretly under a "gentlemen's agreement" to avoid publicity for the hospitals.

Barasch adamantly denied that allegation, saying he has granted 60 interviews about Medicare fraud since the project began two years ago. He noted each single settlement is relatively small.

"In the last three years, I haven't issued a single press release on a civil case," he said. "For the most part, these are very small claims,

claims of \$20,000 to \$25,000."

Last week, he said, he issued a news release that cited the overall figures and noted the task force has recovered \$20 million during the fiscal year.

The Inquirer quoted Mary Catherine Frye, the lead prosecutor in the fraud unit, as saying press releases "would take away the incentive for the hospitals to deal with us amicably."

Health-care advocates and watchdog groups worry that the government is quietly settling the cases, the newspaper said.

"It would seem to me that the public has more to gain from a full airing of the fraud at hand than they do from Justice Department officials not having the discomfort of having an antagonistic relationship with the hospitals," said Danielle Bryan, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight, a Washington-based watchdog group.

Mutated cells linked to skin cancer

Sunlight turns on problem-causing cells, study shows

WASHINGTON (AP) — Skin patches chronically exposed to sunlight have up to 10 times more cancer-causing gene mutations than does skin that is normally protected from the sun, a new study shows.

Douglas Brash, a professor at the Yale University School of Medicine and lead author of the study, said the findings provided new evidence that sunlight can turn on a cancer-causing mechanism in normal, healthy skin.

"We are all sitting here with precancerous cells in our skin," Brash said.

A report on the study is to be published today in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science.

Using skin taken from patients who had cosmetic surgery, the researchers looked for cells that contained a mutated form of a gene called p53. This mutation has been linked in earlier studies to basal cell and squamous cell skin cancer. These types of skin cancers are easily controlled if treated early, Brash said.

The researchers found that about 4 percent of the outer skin cells contained mutated p53 genes.

Brash said they found that the p53 cells tended to form in patches instead of being randomly distributed.

Also, he said, patches of cells with the p53 mutated gene tended to be denser in ar-

reas that were chronically exposed to the sunlight. The cell patches with the mutated genes averaged about 20 per square inch in sun-protected skin, but up to 200 per square inch in the sun-exposed skin.

Brash said the study suggested that ultraviolet radiation from the sun not only caused the p53 gene mutations, but that continued exposure caused the mutated cells to more readily spread by making copies of themselves.

The researchers found, however, that when sun-damaged skin was protected from sunlight, the number of p53 mutated cells tended to go down, suggesting that the body was somehow eliminating those cells.

"If you stay out of the sun, these cells tend to go away," he said. "We don't know exactly how this happens," Brash said, but he said it could be some self-protection mechanism the body uses.

The fact that skin protected from sunlight also has the mutated p53 gene may explain why some people get skin cancer on parts of the body not exposed to the sun, said Darrell Rigel, an associate professor of dermatology at New York University. He said animal studies have suggested that sun exposure can cause a systemic reaction that might trigger skin cancer even in shaded sun.

First Lady wants role in welfare reform

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — Republicans scoffed Monday at Hillary Rodham Clinton's suggestion that she might take a lead role on welfare reform in her husband's second term. The White House played down the idea of the first lady taking a strong policy role.

"If Hillary Clinton does as well with welfare reform as she did with health care reform, we have no problem," House Majority Whip Tom DeLay of Texas said with a wide grin while attending a Republican gathering in Michigan.

It was during the election campaign that President Clinton first raised the prospect of his wife getting involved in welfare policy. This week, in an interview with Time magazine, Mrs. Clinton said she intended to "speak out about welfare reform and write about it."

"If there's a formal role, that would make sense in terms of reporting to the president, kind of like I did on the Gulf War disease. Go out, listen to the people, maybe write him some memoranda," she said.

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