

# News Digest

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## Pilot to be punished for ski-lift accident

■ Other Marines may be disciplined for the incident, in which 20 were killed.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Marines involved in the Italian cable car accident that sent 20 people to their deaths will face disciplinary action in connection with the incident, Pentagon officials said Wednesday.

The Marine Corps has completed its investigation into the incident by finding that the pilot of the EA-6B Prowler was responsible for the incident and was flying too low, said two officials familiar with the report.

The jet severed a ski-lift cable in northern Italy, plunging a cable car containing 20 people into the valley below.

The results were to be announced today at the U.S. air base in Aviano, Italy, by Maj. Gen. Michael DeLong, president of the accident investigation board and deputy commander of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Atlantic, headquartered in Norfolk, Va.

"They found pilot error. The plane was flying too low," said one official, adding that at one point the aircraft was found to have been only 300 feet from the ground, when it should have been flying at 1,000 feet.

"We expect they will refer the matter for disciplinary action," the official said, adding that the final decision will be up to the three-star Marine general in Norfolk, Lt. Gen. Peter Pace, commander of the Marine forces in the Atlantic region.

A second official said it was possible that more than one individual could be disciplined in the matter, but Pace will have to decide exactly what discipline process might be followed.

That could include an Article 32 hearing, which would be a preliminary action in the event of a court martial.

The aircraft had a four-man

crew on temporary assignment at Aviano from the Marine Air Station at Cherry Point, N.C. They are also the target of a civilian investigation by Italian authorities.

The crew of the Prowler has been grounded since the accident and could face serious charges if investigators say they were negligent.

The Marines have said the Prowler clearly was below its authorized limit of 1,000 feet when it hit the lift cables on a clear afternoon on Feb. 3. The cable was about 370 feet off the ground at the point of impact. They also admitted that the ski resort at Cavalese was not on the crew's map.

The crew's Italian lawyer suggested earlier that the plane's altimeter might have malfunctioned, but subsequent tests reportedly showed that it was working.

The Italian air force says the Prowler was off course, and residents of the Alpine valley where the accident happened say it looked like the pilot was "hot-dogging."

Undersecretary of Defense Massimo Brutti plans his own news conference today after the American briefing.

The tragedy stirred strong anti-American feelings in Italy, especially when Aviano was less than forthcoming at the outset with Italian investigators. It drew attention to demands from the Communist party to close down U.S. bases in Italy.

Aviano is one of the biggest United States air bases in Italy, a staunch NATO ally. The United States also has several important navy and army bases there.

Heads have already rolled as a result of the incident. The Marine Corps relieved a colonel of his squadron command at Cherry Point, saying he had ordered subordinates to get rid of videotapes showing Marine aircraft in low-flying training missions similar to one on Feb. 3.

## TV v-chip technology will soon be available

New sets will be able to block unwanted programs

WASHINGTON (AP) — Regulators are about to take the final step toward making available TV sets that let viewers block unwanted shows based on ratings.

The Federal Communications Commission, carrying out the wishes of Congress and the Clinton administration, is expected today to adopt technical standards for equipping sets with the "v-chip" blocking technology.

A 1996 telecommunications law requires that televisions sold in the United States with screens 13 inches and larger must eventually have the blocking technology built in. Roughly 23 million sets are sold each year in the United States.

The v-chip will work with TV ratings for sex, violence and language content aired on broadcast and cable programs. New detailed ratings began Oct. 1 on ABC, CBS, Fox and major cable networks. NBC will continue using the less-specific ratings it now airs and that the rest of the industry previously used. Lawmakers are pressuring NBC to join the rest of the industry.

The FCC also is expected to approve the detailed ratings system now in use. The 1996 law requires the FCC to review the system's effectiveness.

NBC officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they don't foresee anything in the FCC's upcoming actions that would prevent the network from continuing to use its rating system. The officials also said viewers would be able to use the v-chip with NBC's ratings to block shows.

TV manufacturers say sets equipped with blocking technology probably won't be in stores until next year.

The FCC is expected to give manufacturers more time than originally proposed to have all new sets equipped with v-chips, according to commission and industry sources who spoke on condition of anonymity. Under that delay, manufacturers would be required to have half the sets sold in America have blocking technology by July 1999 and all of them by one year later, industry sources said. That's a year later than the FCC proposed last year.

The manufacturers said they needed at least 18 months to retool production lines after the FCC adopted the v-chip technical standards.

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CEMA spokesman

"The costs of v-chip sets will be very modest, if noticeable at all," said Jonathan Thompson, spokesman for the Consumer Electronics Manufacturers Association, estimating it would add \$5 to \$20 per set. In high-end sets consumers probably won't see a price change, he said.

Manufacturers aren't bracing for a consumer stampede for v-chip sets.

"Nobody has been clamoring for them," said Thompson.

People usually buy a new television every eight years. The industry estimates it would take four to six years for sets equipped with the v-chip to be in half of the nation's 98 million TV households. There are now 250 million sets in the United States.

Blocking technology is also expected to be put into cable set-top boxes and devices that people can buy and attach to their televisions.

Since the fall, ABC, CBS, Fox and major cable networks have been airing more detailed ratings that use the notations "V," "S," "L" and "D" to flag violence, sexual situation, coarse language and suggestive dialogue. One or more letters are added, when needed, to the "TV-PG" for parental guidance suggested, "TV-14" for programs unsuitable for children under 14 and "TV-MA" for mature audiences only.

NBC is not adding these letter notations, but is using age-based ratings including "TV-PG," "TV-14" and "TV-MA."

Both ratings systems also use "TV-G," suitable for all ages, and special ratings for children's programs.

## Clinton reconsiders plan to neuter his dog

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sorry, Buddy, it's for your own good.

After consulting with his vet — and hearing an appeal from actress Doris Day — President Clinton has decided to neuter his new puppy.

The reluctant president reserved the right to change his mind. In announcing Clinton's decision Tuesday, White House spokesman Barry Toiv said Clinton was "inclined" to allow the procedure.

The Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal protection group, applauded Clinton's decision, saying he was doing the right thing to his pet.

"Neutering or spaying dogs and cats is one of the most important acts a responsible pet owner can take," said Martha Armstrong, a society vice president. "It promotes better physical and behavioral health for dogs and cats, and it helps to address the pet overpopulation crisis."

Clinton set no immediate date for putting Buddy under the knife, leaving some to wonder whether the 7-month-old chocolate Labrador retriever has been told of his fate.

"Buddy's a little too young to understand," Toiv said.

Buddy seemed blissfully unaware of any pending surgery as he played fetch with Clinton on the South Lawn with a green ten-

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MARTHA ARMSTRONG  
Humane Society vice president

nis ball Tuesday.

White House press secretary Mike McCurry said today the procedure was "not likely anytime soon given the dog's age."

Toiv said Clinton's decision was driven by concerns for Buddy's health. He denied that it was motivated by the more than a few salty confrontations the dog has had with Socks, the family cat.

Dr. Jacqueline Suarez, a veterinarian with the Alexandria (Va.) Animal Hospital, said neutering can help curb dogs' aggression toward other animals and tendency to urinate in unwelcome places.

"Although, if we have people questioning if they should or shouldn't, those health reasons are good reasons to neuter as well, so we'll use them as part of the case for neutering," Suarez said.

Doris Day, president of the Doris Day Animal League, sent Clinton a letter in December expressing concern that Buddy

would suffer health problems if he were left intact. Among them was a risk of testicular cancer and prostate infections that could lead to problems with urination.

In January, Clinton spokesman Mike McCurry said there were no plans to neuter Buddy, who had moved into the White House in mid-December.

Clinton physician Connie Mariano has now told Day in a letter that the Clintons had decided to neuter the dog on the advice of their veterinarian.

Armstrong said Buddy need not worry about losing his procreative abilities.

"Pets don't have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering a male dog or cat will not change his basic personality," she said. "He doesn't suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when neutered."

Got that, Buddy?

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