

Searchers examine crash debris

"I have a friend in this plane. But I'm not thinking any more of whether I will find her. I'm just picking up whatever I can find."

Mike Salaguinto
Air Force airman

SAMAL, Philippines (AP) — With plastic garbage bags wrapped around his hands as makeshift gloves, Mike Salaguinto searched smoldering debris and coconut palms for charred remains of the 131 victims of Wednesday's Air Philippines crash.

"I have a friend in this plane. But I'm not thinking any more of whether I will find her. I'm just picking up whatever I can find," the air force airman said. "I can't count how many bodies I've found."

Another black garbage bag covered Salaguinto's head to ward off the drizzle falling on Samal Island, where the Boeing 737-200 crashed early Wednesday on approach to the nearby city of Davao in the southern Philippines. It is the Philippines' worst air disaster ever. Many of those killed — 124 passengers and seven crew members — had been traveling home for

Easter aboard Flight 541 from Manila.

The crash's cause was uncertain, but officials said there were foggy conditions in the area. Searchers found the plane's voice recorder, but the flight data recorder remained buried.

Some searchers used branches to pick through the wreckage. A priest sprinkled water over the remains of victims as he delivered last rites.

By late afternoon, 81 bags of battered body parts had been recovered from the blackened, muddy hilltop, officials said. The remains were flown to a military base where grieving relatives tried to identify them.

The scattered debris at the crash site included an assortment of personal belongings that testified to the lives of the passengers. It included letters, photos, infant formula and an unmarred black stiletto-heeled shoe.

A doctor from the Davao Medical

Center found a charred pair of bodies — a woman hugging a much smaller figure.

"Up to the last minute, the mother was embracing her child," said Dr. Heidi Mancao.

The debris was strewn throughout a coconut grove on Samal, a sparsely populated island that boasts one of the Philippines' best-known beach resorts.

Airport officials said there was fog in the area when the jet went down. The Davao airport does not have the equipment needed for instrument landings in low-visibility conditions, and landings had been suspended for several minutes before the plane's initial approach.

When it made its approach, the 22-year-old plane was unable to land because another plane was on the runway. It crashed as it prepared to make a second approach from the opposite direction.

Memorial welcomed on date of bombing

Names of all victims read during Oklahoma City ceremony.

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Church bells chimed on streets that once rang with a bomb's blast. Children saw their reflections in a calm pool where there was once an ugly crater. And families found serenity Wednesday in a place that has pained them for five years.

On the anniversary of the April 19, 1995, bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, 168 sculpted chairs stood in silent tribute to the 168 victims of the most deadly terrorist attack on American soil.

"To me it's like my funeral for him, my time to say goodbye," said 20-year-old Sarah Broxterman of Las Vegas, who lingered over the stone-and-bronze chair inscribed with the name of her late father, bombing victim Paul Broxterman.

The chairs soon overflowed with flowers as thousands came for the first of two ceremonies to dedicate the Oklahoma City National Memorial at the site of the federal building.

Bells tolled at 9:02 a.m., the exact moment when the fuel-and-fertilizer truck bomb exploded and stripped the face from the building, turning its nine floors into a tomb of concrete and steel.

After the names of the victims were read, family members, survivors and rescuers stepped through one of two golden gates marking the entrance to the memorial. There were 149 large chairs for the adult victims and 19 little ones for the children who died.

"I felt their presence there. I feel their presence every day in the office," said Renee Kiel, who clutched roses as she walked among the 35 chairs representing Housing and Urban Development co-workers.

Children with sticks of chalk scrawled messages on tiles beneath artwork in the children's area of the memorial. Some dipped their fingers into a dark reflecting pool that stretches along what once was the bomb crater. P.J. Allen, who was severely injured but was one of the few children in the building's daycare center to survive, stood waving an American flag.

His hand still bears scars and a tube helps him breathe.

"I thought it was lovely," said his grandmother, Delores Watson.

An honor guard representing the rescuers, who rushed into the building first and stayed for weeks to recover the dead, hoisted a U.S. flag over the site. Lifted by a stiff breeze, the flag snapped to its full length.

President Clinton and Attorney General Janet Reno were to appear at another ceremony Wednesday evening. During the morning event, a pastor urged families, survivors and rescuers to "hold on to the memories" but move on with their lives.

"This whole memorial will serve as a reminder that hate may blow up a building, but we as a people will never forget," said the Rev. Robert Allen, a United Methodist minister who coordinated civilian chaplains during the rescue effort. "We as a people will never forget."

Just blocks away, Terry Nichols sat isolated in an Oklahoma County Jail cell awaiting an August preliminary hearing on 160 state counts of first-degree murder in the attack. Nichols and Timothy McVeigh were convicted in federal court.

McVeigh, who was sentenced to death, is in a federal prison in Indiana.

Nichols had no way of watching or hearing the memorial services, said Sheriff John Whetsel.

"It will be just another day in the life of a typical inmate," he said.

Court order extends Gonzalez's stay in U.S.

ATLANTA (AP) — In a strongly worded ruling today, a federal appeals panel extended a court order keeping Elian Gonzalez in the United States and said the U.S. government should have taken the 6-year-old's wishes into account.

In Miami's Little Havana, a crowd of more than 300 people erupted in cheers and chants of "God Bless America!" after the ruling from a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

"This is the second miracle of Elian," said Ramon Saul Sanchez, leader of Democracy Movement.

"We are taking the right way."

The 16-page ruling bars anyone from attempting to remove Elian from the United States. But it did not specifically forbid the INS from taking custody, and it did not address government efforts to reunite Elian with his father, who has been waiting in Washington since April 6. He wants to return to Cuba.

But the appeals judges expressed support for efforts by Elian's great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez to win an asylum hearing and questioned the Immigration and Naturalization Service's handling of the case.

"According to the record, plaintiff — although a young child — has expressed a wish that he not be returned to Cuba," the judges wrote.

"It appears that never have INS officials attempted to interview plaintiff about his own wishes," the ruling said.

"It is not clear that the INS, in finding plaintiff's father to be the only proper representative, considered all of the relevant factors — particularly the child's separate and independent interests in seeking

"This is the second miracle of Elian. We are taking the right way."

Ramon Saul Sanchez
Democracy Movement leader

asylum."

There was no immediate reaction from the Justice Department, and the INS said it was preparing a statement.

One issue under debate as Justice Department officials met this afternoon was whether their previous promise to that court not to remove Elian from great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez's home still applied.

The ruling, which could be appealed to the full circuit court, is considered a critical step in the international custody dispute that has lasted for nearly five months. It addressed an emergency order issued last week that delayed government efforts to bring Elian to Washington.

In Little Havana, Cuban Americans had feared that only the court order was keeping federal agents from attempting to remove Elian from the home of Lazaro Gonzalez.

Earlier Wednesday, Attorney General Janet Reno said taking the boy by force was an option, but she was trying to avoid any violence.

"There may come a time when there is no other alternative. But we've got to do it in a careful, thoughtful way," Reno said.

Daily Nebraskan

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board.

Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$60 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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WEATHER

TODAY

Windy
high 57 low 35

TOMORROW

Partly cloudy
high 67, low 46

World and Nation Datelines

■ Vermont

State Senate passes bill supporting 'civil unions'

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Bobbi Whitacre and Sandi Cote already are making plans for a small ceremony sanctifying their 33-year relationship. The women are just disappointed they won't be considered "married."

A bill that passed the Vermont Senate on Wednesday gets as close to gay marriage as any place in America, but it still reserves "marriage" for opposite-sex couples.

On a 19-11 vote, the Senate passed a bill creating "civil unions," a legal structure parallel to marriage for gay and lesbian couples.

The landmark proposal would grant to same-sex couples some 300 state benefits of marriage, including medical decision-making, tax breaks and inheritance.

■ Montreal

15-year-old charged for disabling Internet site

MONTREAL (AP) — A 15-year-old boy working under the computer name Mafiaboy has been charged with two counts of mischief for disabling the CNN Internet site for four hours, police said Wednesday.

The Feb. 8 attack was one of several on major international Web sites that exposed the security risks of the high-tech age.

The young suspect — arrested Saturday in a joint investigation with the FBI — boasted in Internet chat rooms frequented by hackers that he was responsible for a number of the attacks, a Canadian Inspector said.

■ Jerusalem

Court sets standard that frees 13 Lebanese detainees

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel used to argue that as a country under siege, it could not always play by the rules. But the Supreme Court set a new standard Wednesday, freeing 13 Lebanese detainees who were held without trial.

The decision came despite the pleas of the mother of an Israeli MIA who hoped the detainees might be traded for her son. After a decision last fall to outlaw torture, the order was another milestone in the court's search for a new balance between security concerns and the rule of law.

Chief Justice Aharon Barak himself is perhaps the best example of the change. In 1997, Barak ruled that Israel has the right to keep holding the Lebanese, seized by Israeli commandos over the past 14 years, as bargaining chips in future negotiations on the release of missing Israeli navigator Ron Arad.

But after agreeing to have a panel of nine judges rehear the case, Barak changed his mind, reportedly after much agonizing.

■ New York

Judge encourages tobacco lawyers to settle disputes

NEW YORK (AP) — A settlement to tobacco cases nationwide would be sensible because they are related and complex, a judge concluded as he ordered lawyers in several cases to prepare for settlement.

"The time for bringing a close to tobacco litigation is nigh," U.S. District Judge Jack B. Weinstein wrote in a three-page order urging lawyers in five major tobacco cases in various stages to begin talks.

Weinstein, a Brooklyn federal jurist since 1967, said the court has a "duty to take affirmative action" to encourage lawyers to seek creative ways to resolve the disputes.