

MSC basement fire ruins supplies

By LEE ROY LESCHPER
Battalion Editor



This is the remains of some of the materials stored in the Memorial Student Center basement after the fire Friday night.

Battalion photo by Bernard Gor

A fire in the basement of Texas A&M University's Memorial Student Center Friday night destroyed a large amount of stored supplies and filled the entire student center with heavy smoke.

The fire, which officials say may have been started by a student painting in the basement, sent two College Station firemen to the hospital with abdominal cramps from heat stress and smoke inhalation. The two, firemen James Golden and Richard Lee, were treated and released.

Four fire units from College Station and one from Bryan worked for about an hour to extinguish the blaze, first reported at 6:45 p.m. Toxic fumes from burning plastic cafeteria furniture and trays stored in the basement overcame several firemen. They were treated with oxygen at the scene.

The firemen worked late into the night clearing burnt and burning paper and boxes from the basement.

"It's just a big cleanup job now," one fireman said about 9:30 p.m., when the cleanup job had just begun.

The basement area, directly below the Post Office, was used to store a wide variety of furniture, forms, paper and books from MSC offices and student organizations. The fire started in one of several bins filled with dishes and flammable packing material, College Station Fire Marshal Harry Davis said.

MSC employees said Friday night that students had been using the basement for some years to paint large signs. At least one student was in the basement before the fire Friday, they said. Two paint cans and a paint roller were found near where the fire started.

Davis said he's not sure what started the fire. "There's a couple of people I've got to talk to," he said. "One of them is a student who was supposed to be in the area when the fire started. As soon as I locate him we may know a lot more."

Most of the materials burned in the fire belonged to the Former Students Association. The fire was concentrated in tall stacks of former students directories.

University officials hadn't estimated the cost of the fire damage yesterday.

"It'll be two or three months before the insurance people can estimate the cost. They'll have to make an extensive inventory of the place. There's no way of knowing what was destroyed," Davis said.

Most of the stored materials may have been damaged by water the firemen used to douse the fire. Almost everything stored in the basement received some water or smoke damage.

Thick black smoke from the fire was pumped throughout the MSC by the center's ventilation system. Officials had initially feared that smoke would do considerable smoke damage within the complex, but apparently it did not. The University ventilation system carried some of

that smoke as far as Wofford Cain Hall and the University Physical Plant.

"We found out it was not what I call 'residue smoke' which leaves a black residue on everything," Davis said. By Saturday morning the smoke had been cleared out by large exhaust fans from Texas A&M's fire school and little smoke smell remained in the center.

Only traces of that smell remained on the first floor yesterday. The main portion of the center was reopened to the public Saturday afternoon.

The fire knocked out power in the basement itself by melting electrical wires running through the basement. The main electrical cable providing power for the entire center was scorched but not destroyed by the fire, MSC Assistant Student Program Coordinator Don Rohel said.

About 25 people were staying in the MSC hotel when the fire started. All were evacuated and moved to other hotels in town.

There's no sprinkler system or other fire control system in the basement, MSC officials said.

"There's not any type of protection at all," Davis said. There are six to eight other unprotected basements on campus that are also being used as storerooms, he said. A similar fire damaged a storage basement below Duncan Dining Hall a couple of years ago.

But this fire may make University officials reevaluate fire safety measures on campus, Davis said.

"This will make them stand back and take a look at safety," he said.

Texas Legislature holds special session

United Press International
JUSTIN, Tex. — The Texas Legislature called into special session by Gov. Jim Briscoe for the first time in four years, scheduled quick hearings on school finance legislation today in an effort to pass a \$1 billion increase in state aid to public schools within a week.

The governor said he would tell the lawmakers during the opening session how he prefers the money be allocated — whether the bulk of the funding should go to reducing the amount of taxes local districts must raise, or to providing opportunities to help equalize education between rich and poor districts.

Gov. Briscoe and Speaker Bill Clayton expressed hope the session will be a short one.

Clayton has predicted the school finance bill could be passed in as little as four days, urging the House to consider Friday a session demanding the removal from office of embattled Supreme Court Associate Justice Donald B. Yarbrough.

Briscoe optimistically said the school finance bill may be completed in a week to 10 days.

"I would hope that would be possible. But I don't think anyone would want to make a definite prediction on how quickly it could be done," he said.

Briscoe has called only one previous special session since he took office in 1973, a three-day session in December, 1973, in which the legislature reduced the state speed limit to 55 miles per hour in compliance with a federal energy program.

School finance is considerably more complex than the speed limit issue, however, and lawmakers were unable to agree on it during the 140-day regular session which ended May 30.

Clayton is pushing a \$900 million plan which places its major emphasis on teacher salaries and decreasing the amount of money local districts are required to raise to fund school programs. A Senate plan gives a slightly smaller amount to teacher salaries, less in direct aid to the local districts, and more money to an equalization fund for poorer school districts.

House liberals have offered a bill which is similar to the Senate plan, but with even more emphasis on equalization.

Hijackers release hostages, end 43-hour takeover

United Press International
AMASCUS, Syria — Five Palestinian hijackers overpowered their leader in an eight-hour struggle, freed their last six hostages and surrendered to Syrian authorities, ending a 43-hour takeover of a Kuwait jetliner.

At least two of the heavily armed hijackers and three hostages jumped the leader yesterday, said to be a commander accused by the Palestinian Liberation Organization of "looting, embezzlement and forgery."

The "traitors," 36-year-old Abu Saed

shouted after he was wrestled to the ground just as the Air Kuwait Boeing 707 took off from the Damascus Airport, official Syrian sources said.

"We're not traitors," one of the gunmen answered. "The demands you're making have nothing to do with what the hijack was originally about."

The split among the hijackers apparently involved their recent expulsion from the PLO's mainstream Al Fatah guerrilla group.

The hijacking began late Friday night when six men, dressed as Syrian soldiers and armed with several handguns and a machine gun, commandeered the jetliner with 45 passengers and a crew of 10 on a flight from Beirut to Kuwait.

They ordered the jetliner flown to its original destination, Kuwait, and exchanged the passengers, including the Kuwaiti ambassador to Lebanon, for two Palestinian Liberation Organization officials and Kuwait's public security chief. They then took off for South Yemen.

But the plane instead landed early yesterday in Damascus, where the gunmen pressed Palestinian Liberation Organization and Syrian negotiators to resolve their dispute with Al Fatah during eight hours of talks under a broiling sun that raised the temperatures inside the plane to over 100 degrees.

The stocky, fair-haired Saed then ordered the three-man British crew to take off, apparently satisfied with a Palestinian Liberation Organization promise of reunification and safe passage to Lebanon.

But he was jumped as the plane took off. Once they were returned to Damascus the gunmen were taken to an undisclosed location under heavy security.

Although Saed made a series of demands ranging from the release of several hundred prisoners in Arab jails to an undisclosed ransom, in the end the hijacking seemed to focus on his dispute with Al Fatah.

A Palestinian Liberation Organization statement yesterday said Saed, who ran the Palestinian Liberation Organization's post office in Lebanon during the civil war, was "arrested" briefly by Al Fatah last month for "looting, embezzlement and forgery."

The Palestinian Liberation Organization hinted that "a certain Arab intelligence apparatus" helped Saed escape from Al Fatah and hijack the plane, but did not name the Arab country involved.



Standing in line

The "L-through-R's" stand in line Thursday morning to register for the second summer semester at A&M. At one point, the line of students waiting to register stretched from DeWare Field House and along three sides of the Wofford Cain Pool. Preliminary estimates on Texas A&M University's second summer session enrollment show a significant decrease from the first session's enrollment. An unofficial report taken Friday from a computer print-out was 7,677 students.

Battalion photo by Steve Goble

Rejects gasoline sale

Carter considering temporary rationing

United Press International
WASHINGTON — President Carter is considering temporary gasoline rationing and other moves to limit foreign oil imports. He has rejected suggestions that oil from the new Alaska pipeline be shipped to Japan.

In making the disclosures yesterday, Carter's energy chief, James Schlesinger, agreed there were technical advantages to a deal in which Alaskan oil would be transported to Japan in exchange for Japanese-bought supplies from the Middle East.

But in spite of reduced shipping costs, Schlesinger said President Carter considers the idea "undesirable."

"There will be no exchanges," Schlesinger said in a television interview on NBC-TV's Meet the Press. "All of the oil coming out of Alaska will have to be shipped to the United States. This will have the advantage of increasing pressure on the companies to bring pipelines from the West Coast into the interior part of the country."

Schlesinger, who soon is expected to be named the nation's first secretary of energy, said the White House is intent on adopting measures that would cut the inflow of Arab oil from an average of 10 million barrels a day to less than 6 million barrels a day.

He said "all sorts of possibilities" are being considered by the administration to stem oil imports and make the nation more energy self-sufficient: "some limitation on the flow of oil into the United States is one possibility, shutting of gasoline stations might be considered."

"Even some temporary rationing schemes might be considered," he said. "The point is that we are looking at a whole array of options in addition to the standby gasoline tax."

He said "an excessive amount of imported oil is coming into the country, forcing onto service stations an unwanted amount of gasoline, which they are pushing on their customers."

As for emergency gasoline rationing, Schlesinger said Carter's contingency plan

"is in response to the requirements of Congress."

Schlesinger said the administration will stand by its 1985 target for converting most industries and utilities to coal despite tough environmental and economic problems.

House Republican leader John Rhodes, interviewed yesterday on ABC-TV's Issues and Answers, said Congress "is in no mood" to give Carter any standby rationing authority beyond that already provided in law.

Limited resources might force some colleges to close

United Press International
POINT CLEAR, Ala. — As resources for higher education become more limited, state legislatures may be forced to let some colleges close, Texas Commissioner of Higher Education Kenneth Ashworth said today.

Changing student populations, combined with a possible slowdown in business and industrial growth, can have dire consequences, Ashworth told the 26th annual legislative work conference of the Southern Regional Education Board.

Ashworth said new responses should be developed to replace the panacea of the 1960's — the "build another building, start a new doctoral program" approach.

Administrators and faculty members must continue to evolve with society, he said.

According to Ashworth, there will be 15 per cent fewer students in science and engineering in 1985 than 1970 and the physical sciences will have a 55 per cent decrease in students.

"Schools are lowering admissions standards to find new clientele," he said.

"Then they have to inflate grades and drop performance standards to keep the students in school."

Professor taking leave of absence to run for House

Phil Gramm, Texas A&M University politics professor and a candidate in last year's Democratic primary for United States Senate, announced Friday he's taking a leave of absence from Texas A&M to enter the race for Congress.

Gramm said he will probably run for Congressman Olin Teague's sixth district if Teague, D-Bryan, does not run for reelection. The 33-year-old professor said he doesn't expect Teague to run again but that his own campaign does not depend on Teague's.

Any campaign announcement would come in the fall, Gramm said, after he has the remainder of the summer build-up campaign and financial support within district.

Teague has been a member of Congress since 1946.

He believes much of the support that I believe is contingent on what Mr. Teague said. Gramm said he expected to get almost all of Teague's support as a congressman does not run again.

It has been rumored for some time that he will not run for re-election because of occurring health problems including loss of his left foot in January. Gramm discounted opposition in the congressional race from Alvarado businessman Don McNeil, who announced candidate in the race June 29. Gramm said he does not expect Chet Edwards, assistant to Teague, to run. Edwards last week he will run if Teague does

Heavy equipment operators' union pickets construction firm building baseball field

The local union of heavy equipment operators is picketing the Bryan firm building Texas A&M University's new baseball stadium. And the disagreement seems to center around a contract the union wants and the firm has not intention of giving.

The firm, Thurmond & Stuart Construction, of Bryan, doesn't have a contract with the Local 450 operating engineers union. The firm doesn't own its own heavy equipment and so has no use for a heavy equipment contract, John Holloway, project manager for the west campus project, said.

But apparently union members became angry when one union member, John Norman, began working on the project as an employee of a local equipment company subcontracted by Thurmond & Stuart, Holloway said. Union members complained that Norman didn't have a front-end man — an assistant to help with the machine — as required by union rules. But because the firm doesn't have a union contract those rules don't apply, Holloway said.

So the union began to picket the construction site June 23, a Thursday. That day and the next the laborers and carpenters on the job — both union-contracted by the firm — honored the pickets and didn't come to work, Holloway said. But after talking with the business agent for the operators union, the other two unions returned to work the next Monday and have stayed on the job since. And the operators have kept on picketing.

The union member picketing last week said the union just wants the same kind of contract it has had on earlier Texas A&M construction projects. They don't want to stop anybody from making a living, he said, but they do want construction jobs with all union labor or none.

He suggested the firm is trying to make larger profits by paying wages lower than the union's minimum \$10.37 per hour. Holloway doesn't deny it.

Without the union contract operators have to be paid \$9.87 per hour, according to a set of minimum wage requirements set up by the University under State law, Holloway said. Because Thurmond & Stuart subcontracts for heavy equipment and operators, they don't pay that wage directly — the subcontractor does. But, wages are still 50 cents per hour cheaper than under union contract.

A union picket also complained that the subcontracted firm, Van Delden Construction of San Antonio, was taking the construction money out of the local economy. But the real concern seems to be getting a union contract for the next university construction job.

Holloway is more concerned about his own deadlines.

"We've got a job to build," he said. "We'll just do it. We've got a deadline and we just can't wait."

—Lee Roy Leschper Jr.



Joe Cortes, a member of Local Union 450, at the construction site of the new Texas A&M baseball field.

Battalion photo by Steve Goble