

Mom making calls

Son delayed abroad

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — A determined mother's telephone calls to the White House, 5th Army headquarters, Gov. Mark White, two congressmen and a senator have produced some sympathy, but little hope of getting her soldier son home in time for Christmas.

Patricia Garza said Tuesday that her son, Pfc. Steven Garza, 24, and about 300 other U.S. servicemen in Korea probably lost their chance to spend Christmas at home because their commercial airline flight was canceled.

Garza's flight plans now call for him to be home Dec. 28, but his mother said that was not soon enough and there was no guarantee he will make it then.

The young soldier's problem began when his tour of duty, scheduled to end in early November, was extended for 30

days for lack of replacements. He was supposed to fly home Dec. 9 with 300 other servicemen, but the flight was canceled.

"The Army is saying it cannot charter another commercial flight," Mrs. Garza said. "I asked, 'why don't you call the Air Force? Aren't you guys on the same side?'"

Mrs. Garza said she called Gov. White, 5th Army Headquarters, the White House, U.S. Sen. John Tower, R-Texas; U.S. Rep. Tom Loeffler, R-Texas; and U.S. Rep. Henry Gonzalez, D-Texas.

The governor's people were "out to lunch," she said, and the White House said an inquiry would take eight to 10 days. Tower's office, which did not know the senator's immediate

whereabouts, said there was nothing the Army could do.

"The secretaries in the offices were very nice but not very effective," Mrs. Garza said.

But Gonzalez, who does not represent the woman's district, offered his assistance.

"It could be a curtailment in the services provided to active servicemen and that would be deplorable," Gonzalez said.

"There's no reason otherwise why the young man couldn't be flown back. I'm going to try to insist that, insofar as possible, they provide military transportation."

Meanwhile, Garza is on standby travel, and his superiors want him to return to work while he awaits a flight from Korea.

New soil tester invented

United Press International
LUBBOCK — A soil chemist tinkering with items found around his house and lab has created a simple soil testing machine that performs tasks done by mass-produced testers costing thousands of dollars.

Extension service chemist Dale Pennington, 44, has built a miniature assembly line that shakes, moves and tests soil samples contained in small cups. It has been used to test for nitrogen nitrate since May, and he plans to build three more machines to test for three more chemicals.

A modified hedge trimmer mechanism does the shaking; a chain about the size of a small combine chain holds and moves the cups in a loop-sided circle around several controls including timers and a printout of the results.

The electrical contraption is run by a motor that used to drive a ballroom light, he said.

Pennington originally had fruit jar lids holding the cups on the chain, but they have been replaced with more sophisticated-looking steel rings.

A lift device he designed while a Texas A&M student 13 years ago is a key part of the machine, which some lab workers have dubbed "the beast," but which he calls La'Sas for Lubbock Automated Soil Analysis System.

The lift lowers a probe into each cup at the proper time. The cup contains a farmer's soil sample suspended in a liquid. The probe tests the sample for the amount of a particular chemical.

"As far as I know this is the first system in the United States," Pennington said dur-

ing a recent interview. Other labs use machines that cost between \$25,000 and \$40,000, or else have employees do the task manually.

"At two minutes a sample and 240 samples you get a little bit tired and bored," Pennington said of the manual method. "This equipment eliminates the boring process and gains time because samples can be tested during lunch and coffee breaks."

Calling necessity the mother of invention, he said the automation also freed lab employees to do other types of tests while hastening the testing of samples submitted by farmers from 102 Texas counties.

The lab receives up to 4,000 samples a month during its peak time of January and February. Farmers now receive their test results about a

week after the lab receives the sample, but Pennington said he wanted to cut that to three days.

"With a controlled system like this, our tests will become more accurate," Pennington said, adding that progress eventually would include four machines tied into a \$10,000 computer system.

But he said he had to generate more money before he could afford to buy the link to connect the computer system with his machines. Then all a lab employee will have to do is load and unload the machine.

"I am going to contact some foundations to see if I can get a one-time grant," he said.

Pennington said he had started the process of getting a patent for his machine.

Patrols search for boat

United Press International
GALVESTON — Coast Guard patrol boats searched Tuesday for two people last seen clinging to a capsized boat 200 yards off the south jetty in Galveston Bay.

"A boat came by from out there saying a boat had capsized and that a shrimp boat was out there trying to help two people in the capsized boat," said Coast Guard Petty Officer John Dec.

"We're not sure if they were brought to shore or if they're out there. We're hoping the shrimp boat did bring them ashore, but we wished they would tell us about it," Dec said.

There was no sign of the pair when the Coast Guard reached the overturned 18-foot pleasure craft.

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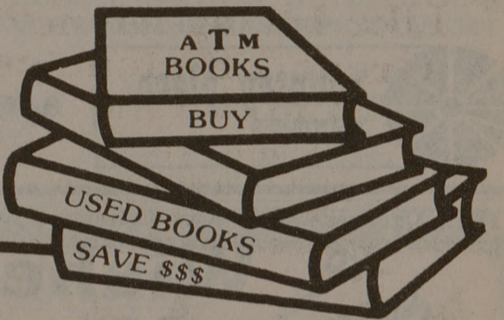
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