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Texas A&M The Battalion

Serving the University community

Vol. 80 No. 60 USPS 045360 8 pages

College Station, Texas

Wednesday, November 21, 1984

Identification of explosion victims begins

United Press International

MEXICO CITY — The charred bodies of more than 500 victims of a earth-jarring gas explosion, some of them clung together in a frozen death grip, were lined up in a building Tuesday for identification by weeping relatives.

Red Cross officials said at least 544 people were killed in the inferno that erupted early Monday when a gas truck exploded near a gas distribution plant in San Juan Ixhuatpec, one of several impoverished neighborhoods clustered on Mexico City's northern edge.

More than 1,500 were injured and 10,000 left homeless in the worst in-

dustrial disaster in Mexican history. The cause of the explosion is under investigation.

Rescue workers wearing gas masks and welding shovels and picks continued searching for more victims. Cranes and bulldozers moved the twisted rubble of the brick and adobe homes and buildings razed by the explosion.

Coroners lined up bodies in the Tulpetic Civic Center, a large community center, some 15 miles north of the poor working class neighborhood where more than a half million people lived.

Esther Guadalupe Hernandez, coordinator of identification services

at the Mexico state coroner's office, helped families move down seven rows of blackened and mutilated remains in a vain attempt at identifying relatives.

"We have counted 505 bodies of victims lined up here for identification," Hernandez told UPI.

Red Cross spokesman Jose Calderon said the bodies of 544 people killed in the fire had been recovered. He said that because of the severe burns covering most of the dead, only 317 bodies had been identified.

The death toll varied because of difficult access to the devastated area and a number of groups responsible

for evacuating victims and retrieving bodies.

Men, women and children moved silently in front of the bodies at the civic center, covering their faces from the stench. Although tears spilled down cheeks, the large tin-roofed building was silent, no voices pierced the still cool air.

Petra Arvizu said she had gone to buy milk before sunrise Monday when the first blast hit the Unigas gas distribution center.

"It was the most horrible thing I have ever seen. I have read about how God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. That must have been something like this.

"We all ran like crazy. I was thinking about my children. I was desperate ... the more I was running, the more I got burned," Arvizu said, who suffered serious burns to her left hand and had a reddened bald spot where her hair was burned away.

"I prayed to God that he would give me the strength to keep running through the fire to my home, even though my legs wouldn't carry me any more."

The family's cardboard shack and an entire row of hundreds like them were destroyed by fire from the subsequent explosions.

Chunks of walls, shattered glass

and broken furniture littered the blackened neighborhood, where whole blocks of houses were destroyed.

The state-run energy company, Pemex, said investigators had not determined the original cause of the disaster. It was triggered by a fire on a liquid gas tanker truck that spread to tanks of the Unigas Co. and then to a Pemex gas storage center. A Pemex spokesman identified the gas involved in the explosion as a mixture of butane and propane.

Residents reported at least a dozen explosions followed the first blast.

Old Ag says traditions not easy to start

By ADA FAY WOOD
Reporter

John Adams, Class of '73, said Tuesday that most outsiders see Texas A&M as consisting mainly of the Corps of Cadets, but that isn't true.

Adams' speech, "All You Ever Wanted To Know About Texas A&M, But Were Afraid To Ask," was sponsored by the A&M Traditions Council in the Memorial Student Center Lounge.

"There is a very definite way of doing things at A&M, and there must be something more than the Corps," Adams said.

Other schools have tried to create the same intangible spirit that the Aggies have by announcing that the student body will do certain things, and the results are usually negative, Adams said. For example, one college in the North informed the students that they would be expected to stand during their football game just like the Aggies. They stood about 5 minutes, he said.

"People don't realize that these things weren't just written down and ordered," Adams said.

Through the years, the numerous traditions followed today by A&M students were picked by the students, he said.

"The student body sifts through them and decides what they want to be tradition," he said.

After Adams spoke on the why and how of traditions in general at A&M, he went on to explain specific reasons for the ones we follow today and their origin.

For instance, where did the word "Aggie" come from?

In the early days, the A&M football team was called the farmers or the cadets, but the word "aggie" was derived from the title of the college, agriculture, Adams said.

In 1940, the students were beginning to use "Aggie" as their name and then in 1946 the campus post office was named the Aggie Land Station, he said.

"Aggie Land" was soon picked by others and started the change of reference to the whole college, Adams said.

Another tradition he mentioned was how the school colors became maroon and white. The colors started out as red and gray when the football team originated in 1921, he said.

When the football jerseys were ordered they were either red and gray or red and white, but one time the factory didn't have red; they had something called maroon but it was really red they stressed, Adams said.

"They didn't have fancy colors back then," he said.

The current coach, Charlie Moran, didn't like it, but he said send the jerseys anyway, Adams said. The factory tried to convince Moran that the players would look bigger and heavier in the darker color, and possibly they needed it, since the average player back then was 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed about 148 pounds, he said.



Photo by FRANK IRWIN

Happy Thanksgiving?

With the Thanksgiving holidays just around the corner, these turkeys at the Poultry Science Center seem to be a little worried about

what's in store for them. But then again, maybe they're not because after all, they're just dumb birds.

Largest manhunt in U.S. history

3,300 fugitives arrested

United Press International

NEW YORK — Attorney General William French Smith said Tuesday that a series of "sting" operations was the key to an eight-week, eight-state sweep netting 3,300 fugitives — the largest yield from a manhunt in U.S. history.

Smith and Stanley Morris, U.S. marshals director, were enthusiastic about the sweep, even though at least half of those arrested have been or will be set free on bail.

"This marks one of the most significant law enforcement efforts ever undertaken," Smith said at a news conference Tuesday. "Never before have so many who have fled from justice been seized."

The manhunt cost \$2.5 million and included 225 officers from every state.

Agents lured criminals through several scams, including the "Brooklyn Bridge Delivery Service," in which agents sent the fugitives notices to pick up expensive packages. When the criminals showed up to

sign for the goods, they were nabbed.

The suspects were lured into the arms of the law with offers of cheap tickets to rock concerts.

Smith said those captured are either career criminals or "individuals wanted for the most heinous crimes, such as rape and murder." The fugitives nabbed in the sweep averaged four convictions each.

The sweep — dubbed FIST for Fugitive Investigative Strike Team — marked the seventh such operation in three years.

Mail carrier's mother speaks about Port case

By KAREN WALLACE
Reporter

For the first time since her daughter's death, 53-year-old Barbara Shatz is mad enough to talk about the days surrounding Deborah Sue Shatz's murder.

The crevices etched in her face reveal her age and her pain. Shatz, a Houston mail carrier, was found in a garbage bag in a field in Northwest Houston.

David Port, 17, is charged with the murder.

Shatz talked about her daughter's death in an interview Saturday Nov. 17, in her home in Houston.

Shatz is angry, and her pain overrides her frustration. In the morning paper, Bernard Port, the father of the boy accused of the murder, labels his wife a hero. Odette Port chose to stay in jail rather than answer six questions about her son's involvement in the murder.

"They ain't no heroes," Shatz said quietly. Her downcast eyes focus on her wringing hands. "What about my daughter and my husband?"

Shatz's husband suffered a fatal heart attack three months after his daughter's death. Shatz is convinced the attack was brought on by her daughter's death.

"He was fine," she said. "He went to work for a week and two days. Then he came home and said he couldn't go on. It was too much. He couldn't accept it. He couldn't talk about it. He held it inside."

Shatz remembers in detail the days surrounding Deborah's death, and she's ready to tell her story.

"I'm going to have to find out what happened to my daughter that day before I have peace of mind," she said.

It was Thursday, June 7, about 3:30 p.m. Deborah Sue Shatz was late. She usually was home by then.

Although she shared an apartment with a friend, she always came home after work and stayed for dinner.

"I knew something was wrong," Shatz remembered. "At 6:00 I decided to take a shower then call and see if she was at home."

The next thing Shatz remembers is the phone call from the Post Office. They said Deborah was missing and asked if there was any reason why she would leave her job.

"I told them no," Shatz said, looking over at two of her sons, the oldest and the youngest of nine children, for support. "I knew she was an honest girl. They thought she had stolen the mail truck. She'd never do anything like that."

"Before I got off the phone, I said 'Oh my God, Oh my God.' That's all I kept saying."

"The next morning, I heard about them finding her car."

Shatz said that a few hours before the car was found, she knew Deborah was dead.

"I had an image of her," she said slowly. "It came to me that Friday before noon. She had all the red bumps I seen on her face when they found her. I told them (Deborah's sisters) we didn't have to look any further."

The red bumps Shatz saw were the ant bites on Deborah's face.

Anger replaced grief as she began talking about Bernard and Odette Port and the way the case is being handled.

"What they're doing is all wrong," she said. "The evidence is all in the house."

Shatz said Deborah, who was working that route for a friend, would never have willingly gone into the Port's house.

Even though it's going to be painful, she will attend the trial.

A&M's default rate low for student loans

By ANN BRIMBERRY
Reporter

Texas A&M maintains one of the lowest rates for defaults on student loans in the nation, says Al Bormann, assistant director of student financial aid.

A&M offers three different types of student loan programs: the Hinson-Hazlewood College Student Loan Program, the Health Professions Student Loan Program and the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan.

"During an entire year we will service between \$40 million to \$50 million of financial aid, and we will serve at least one-half of the student body," Bormann said.

The Hinson-Hazlewood loan is a guaranteed student loan operated by the state of Texas. A&M students have borrowed \$14,173,235 since the program began in 1966, with a default rate of 4 percent.

The Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Program has issued a total of \$39,150,000 for students to attend A&M. These loans are made possible through commercial lenders. The program has been in operation since 1981 and maintains a 1 percent default rate.

Under the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Program, 193 lawsuits have been filed against defaulted A&M students since 1965.

"A&M is one of our best institutions," said Chester Toothman, manager of pre-claims, claims and collections for the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Program. "They are a good quality of students and collection is much better than at other schools like Texas Tech, with 331 lawsuits, and the University of Texas, with 874."

Toothman said the access to student loans is higher than ever before.

"Because the student loan program is so upbeat now, problems do occur, but these are even minimal. Ninety-nine out of 100 students at A&M are making payments, and that is a tremendous amount."

The fiscal office is in charge of the disbursement of funds, whereas, the director of student financial aid is responsible for determining which students will qualify for aid.

"This way you separate duties and responsibilities and build into it a system of checks and balances," Bormann said.

Bormann said A&M students do face up to their responsibilities.

"A&M's default rate is 3 to 4 percent," he said. Many universities have default rates of 5 percent to 10 percent, and much higher.

Bormann said the financial aid office briefs students on the overall ob-

ligations of the loan. Counselors urge students not to try to receive as much financial aid as they can qualify for, but only to apply for the amount of loan they actually need, so as not to burden themselves after graduation, he said.

"If a student is late paying on his loan, we first send him past due letters," Georgianne Bigam, assistant manager for student financial aid, said.

Mack Adams, assistant commissioner for student services' coordinating board for Texas universities, said the most difficult problem with defaulted loans is in locating the students.

"We employ nine full-time skip-tracers who try to locate students with defaulted loans," Adams said. "I would personally like to squelch the rumor of people who have never

paid back their loans and think that it will never catch up with them. Every dollar now counts, and everyone is serious."

Those who have defaulted can expect to face difficult consequences for a long time, he said.

Bigam said the loan program at A&M has grown quite a bit.

"We have not quite doubled the amount of short term loans in two years," Bigam said.

Bormann said the success rate at A&M speaks for itself.

"You read so much where students are defaulting, ripping-off the system, taking advantage of opportunities," he said. "These are the negative things you hear nationally, but yet at A&M, the student default rate is very low, and this is a story that needs to be revealed."