

by Kevin Thomas

At least 3 die in crash in Robstown

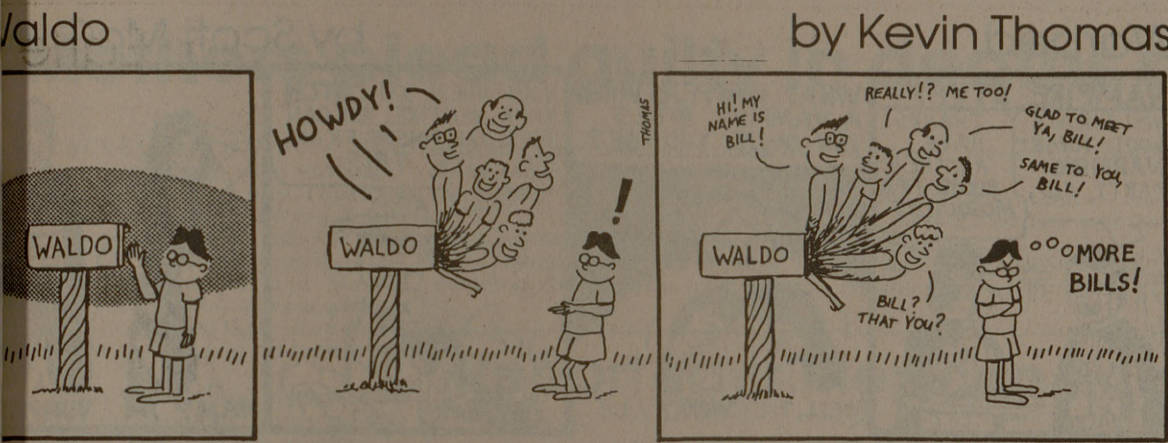
ROBSTOWN (AP) — At least three people died Thursday in an explosive highway collision that forced the evacuation of nearby homes after a chemical-carrying truck overturned, officials said.

Robstown Police Chief Eddie Mejia said the ensuing fire gutted the vehicles so badly that it was impossible to say how many people had died. But witnesses said at least three people were killed.

Homes around the site on U.S. Highway 77 were evacuated briefly before 1 p.m., but some of the residents were later allowed to return, Mejia said.

Department of Public Safety spokesman George Elisondo said a car entering Highway 77 from County Road 44 apparently turned into the path of a southbound tractor-trailer rig that then hit the car, jackknifed, rumbled across the northbound lanes and hit another car.

Firefighters battled a blaze that had spread to a nearby railroad bridge, he said.



Waco man held in extortion case

SAN ANTONIO — A 59-year-old Waco man accused of threatening to tamper with cafeteria food if he didn't get ransom money was ordered held without bond Thursday, U.S. magistrate said.

John W. Dalseg, special agent in charge of the FBI in San Antonio, said Albert Richard Essig was charged with extortion in a scheme that spanned two years and involved cafeterias and at least three other businesses.

Essig allegedly left extortion notes during the last two weeks at a

Wyatt's cafeteria in Austin and Luby's cafeteria in Waco that demanded \$50,000, Dalseg said.

Essig was arrested Wednesday night at a public phone booth while allegedly making an extortion call to the Austin cafeteria, Dalseg said, emphasizing that no food had been tampered with at any business.

"We have been aware of someone perpetrating this kind of scheme for two years," Dalseg said. "In January, a drop (of ransom money) was made but there was no pickup."

In all, he said, four money drops

have been made, but no one ever picked up the cash.

Federal magistrate Phil Sanders said Thursday that Essig would appear in court again within five days for a detention hearing.

Dalseg said Essig was charged with interference with interstate commerce by extortionate means. A conviction carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.

"The investigation is continuing and further charges are possible against Essig," Dalseg said.

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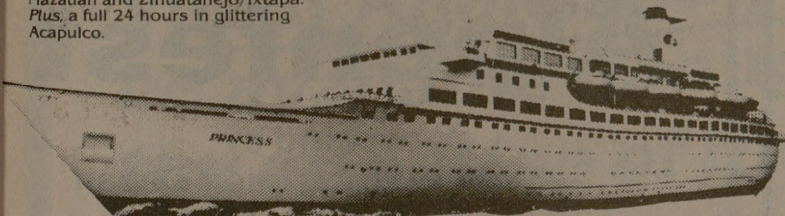
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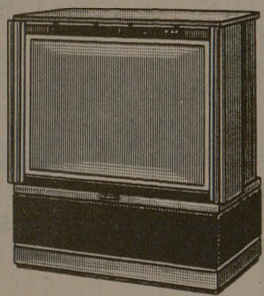
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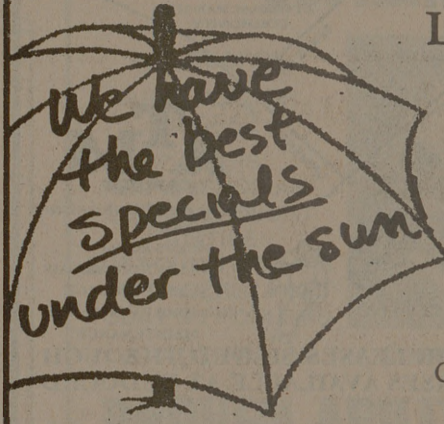
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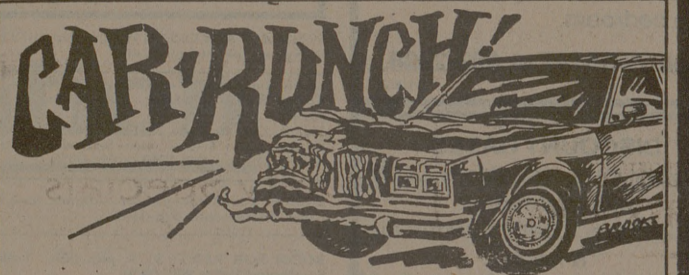
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