

Slouch

By Jim Earle



"Now, that's what I call a Christmas tree!"

# Airline officers call FAA air surgeon's policy dangerous

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Federal Aviation Administration's top medical officer defended his practice of certifying commercial pilots Wednesday, but a congressional panel was told there is almost universal agreement among airlines that his decisions pose serious air safety problems.

Dr. Frank Austin Jr., the FAA's air surgeon, blamed the controversy on a "difference of medical opinion" and said he is confident his decisions on pilot medical appeals "present no safety risk."

But in an appearance before a House subcommittee, Austin acknowledged that of 18 to 20 cases about which he had received complaints, 75 percent of the pilots later were barred from flying by their employer and several of the pilots subsequently suffered heart attacks.

The physician, who became the FAA's top medical officer two years ago, appeared before the House subcommittee on government activities and transportation along with three of his strongest critics: the medical adviser to the Air Line Pilots Association and medical directors at two major airlines.

"There is almost universal agreement that we have a very serious air safety problem" in the way the FAA under Austin has handled commercial pilots' medical appeals, testified Robert Wick, chief medical officer at American Airlines.

Wick said that Austin has often overruled recommendations by a panel of cardiac specialists and often accused the FAA physician of "failing . . . to appreciate the seriousness of many of these (medical) conditions."

Dr. Gary Kohn, corporate medical director at United Airlines, testified that the FAA certification cases since Austin took over often have re-

flected "poor judgment" and "irrational decision making" that has allowed unfit pilots to be recertified for duty.

Both Wick and Kohn said that their airlines have barred a number of pilots from flying even though they were approved by Austin, but Kohn added other airlines, including some without medical departments, may not review the FAA decisions as closely.

Among recent cases cited in which Austin found pilots fit to fly at major airlines were:

- A pilot whose peripheral vision was so poor that he was considered blind in terms of the right side of his visual field.

- A 54-year-old pilot who had a medical condition that caused him to suddenly lose consciousness.

- A pilot who had heart disease and extensive heart damage with a good chance of a recurring heart attack.

"Each of these cases has the potential (of the pilot) controlling an aircraft at a vital point in flight," said Kohn.

Richard Stone, chairman of the medical committee of the Air Line Pilots Association, accused Austin and the FAA of "experimenting with new medical theories" in the cockpit of commercial airliners.

"We now have an unknown number of pilots with severe medical conditions being allowed back into the cockpit," said Stone, who flies for Delta Air Lines.

Anthony Broderick, the FAA air surgeon's boss, said the agency is putting together an outside panel of physicians to review each of Austin's decisions about which there have been complaints.

# American Airlines purchases majority of AirCal parent

FORT WORTH (AP) — American Airlines announced Wednesday that it completed its purchase of a majority of the stock of ACI Holdings, parent company of AirCal Inc.

American bought 60.1 percent, or almost 5.45 million shares, of the ACI stock from the company's two principal shareholders, The William Lyon Co. and George L. Argyros.

The transaction was part of a merger agreement between Ameri-

can and ACI announced Nov. 17, under which American would acquire ACI's stock at \$15 per share.

The Department of Transportation earlier authorized American to purchase up to six million shares of ACI stock. Most of the shares were placed in a trust pending approval of the merger, American said.

AirCal Inc., based in Newport Beach, Calif., is one of the two largest regional carriers in California.

# Deported guru's ranch for sale; includes airport, paved run way

## Deserted Rajneesh home still popular with Oregon's visitors

**Editor's note — For Sale: Abandoned commune. Includes 64,000-acre ranch, 140-room hotel, 95 town houses, 42 quadruplex cabins, 200 A-frame cabins, 52 double-wide mobile homes, 39 commercial buildings, and airport with paved runway. Must sell. Previous guru departed. Asking \$28.5 million.**

RAJNEESH PURAM, Ore. (AP) — The signs that point the way to Rancho Rajneesh have been torn, but tourists still find the place, enduring miles of tortuous gravel road to see the former world headquarters of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. The white-bearded Rajneesh, who calls himself the "rich man's guru," was deported to his native India last November after spending 4½ years presiding over a commune that as many as 10,000 red-clad disciples claimed as their home.

Some 15,000 jammed Rajneeshpuram during the sect's annual summer festivals.

The commune was disbanded soon after Rajneesh departed.

Now only a maintenance crew of followers remains; most of the rest have dispersed around the world.

Gone, too, is the fleet of more than 90 Rolls-Royce cars from which the bejeweled Indian guru chose for his daily "driveby."

The driveby was a ritual in which singing and chanting disciples tossed flowers on the hood of the car as Rajneesh slowly drove past.

The four roadside guard stations, once staffed by armed disciples who screened visitors, stand empty now.

At the first, a hand-drawn sign is posted: "Closed. No hotel — no restaurant — no tours — no gas."

Weeds sprout in a soccer field, on a footpath and in flower beds. Only the county road is accessible; private roads are blocked by boulders or chains.

The road winds past the deserted airport and downtown, where the shopping mall once bustled with disciples.

Now posters of Rajneesh stare from a window of the closed bookstore at an empty parking lot.

The property is for sale, with the original asking price of \$40 million lowered to \$28.5 million.

The 64,000-acre ranch includes orchards, a vineyard and a 65-acre vegetable farm.

There also are two lakes stocked with fish and six miles of frontage on the John Day River.

Residential buildings, according to advertisements, include a 140-room hotel, 95 town houses, 42 quadruplex cabins, 200 A-frame cabins and 52 double-wide mobile homes.

Also included is the house in which Rajneesh lived, billed as one of two "luxury housing estates."

Thirty-nine commercial and industrial build-

ings are listed, with overall space of 470,000 square feet.

The structures include a shopping mall, boutiques, warehouses and repair garages.

The airport on the property has a 4,500-foot paved runway.

The Rajneeshes bought the arid, over-grazed property for \$6 million. They said they pumped more than \$100 million into the ranch.

Up to \$5 million of the sale revenue will go to the state and to victims of crimes committed by Rajneeshes as part of the settlement of a racketeering lawsuit against sect organizations.

Rajneesh, 54, pleaded guilty to two immigration charges and returned to India under an agreement with federal officials.

He since has visited and been evicted from a series of other countries and at last report was back in India.

The pistol-packing and acid-tongued Ma Anand Sheela, who ran the commune's business affairs as Rajneesh's top lieutenant, is serving a 4½-year term in a federal prison.

Sheela, 36, pleaded guilty in July to charges that included the attempted murder of Rajneesh's physician with a poison-filled syringe.

She is to be deported to her native India when she gets out of prison.

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