

THE BATTALION

News in Brief

Preschoolers held hostage

WASSERBILLIG, Luxembourg (AP) — A man armed with a pistol, hand grenade and knife held some 20 children and two teachers hostage at a small-town preschool early Thursday. He had released eight children earlier and demanded a plane and a car.

Up to 30 children, none older than 7, were taken hostage in mid-afternoon Wednesday by a 40-year-old man in Wasserbillig, near the Germany border.

The suspect had been holding between 25 and 30 children before police persuaded him to release eight, said Victor Schlentz of the Luxembourg police. He added that police were trying to verify how many children were still being held.

Alleged killer enters plea

SPOKANE (AP) — A man charged with shooting and killing eight prostitutes in one of the state's largest serial killing cases pleaded innocent Wednesday.

Robert L. Yates, 48, entered the pleas to aggravated first-degree murder stemming from the killings in Spokane in 1997 and 1998.

He also pleaded innocent to single counts of first-degree attempted murder and first-degree robbery stemming from an assault on a woman

who survived. The woman was unable to identify Yates from a photo lineup but said he looked like the man who had assaulted her, police said in court documents.

The prosecution contends robbery was a motive in the killings because the victims had been stripped of cash and purses. The women were shot with small-caliber weapons and their heads were wrapped in plastic grocery bags.

Fire ravages New Mexico

PECOS, N.M. (AP) — Firefighters worked Wednesday to turn the front edge of a 22,000-acre fire north toward the Pecos Wilderness and away from the main watershed for Las Vegas, N.M.

Ground crews with bulldozers cut fire lines to protect the Gallinas Canyon watershed a mile away, while air tankers carrying fire retardant and helicopters carrying buckets of water hit the fire from above.

The columns of smoke that roiled skyward Tuesday were gone Wednesday as thick smoke laid flat over the burned and burning area, blanketing Interstate 25 in spots. The air was hazy and smelled of smoke in Las Vegas. The city is about 12 miles from the blaze and out of its path.

A wildfire set by lightning May 24 has burned through 9,500 dry acres of Kaibab National Forest in Arizona.

Former Air Force captain discharged

Military orders doctor to repay \$70,000 education fee for admitting homosexuality

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — In exchange for a four-year commitment to the Air Force, Dr. John Hensala got top-flight medical training at Northwestern University and Yale, unburdened by the costs of tuition and books.

Then, seven months before the psychiatrist was to report for full-time military duty, he announced to his superiors that he is gay.

He was promptly discharged and billed \$70,000 for the cost of his education.

The military has made similar demands of dozens of other gays who have been ousted. But Hensala is challenging the demand for reimbursement in court, in what could be the first such lawsuit against the Pentagon.

The Air Force said Hensala deliberately timed his announcement to get out of his military obligation.

But Hensala, 35, said he did not know he was gay when he signed up.

"This is largely on principle," Hensala said in an interview in his apartment in San Francisco's largely gay Castro District. "I would be able to pay back the funds eventually. But an employer who fires someone just because they're gay ... I don't think it's the right of the employer to say, 'You owe us this money.'"

In 1986, before the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, Hensala entered the Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarship Program. In exchange for tuition, Hensala served 20 weeks of active duty over four years.

He earned a medical degree at Northwestern University. The Air Force agreed to defer his active duty service dur-

ing his three-year residency at Yale, and then put it off again while he took a two-year fellowship in child psychiatry at the University of California at San Francisco.

Finally, in 1994, the Air Force told him that his four years of active duty would have to begin the following year.

Days later, after he hired a lawyer, Hensala announced that he is gay.

"In light of recent policy changes concerning homosexuality ... I have decided that I should inform you, prior to

beginning active duty service, that I am gay," his letter to his superiors said. "I do not believe this will affect my ability to serve in the Air Force as a child psychiatrist."

He later submitted a list of gay rights groups with which he was involved and a list of people who could confirm his homosexuality. He then called his adviser at Scott Air Force Base near St. Louis and asked about housing there for his boyfriend.

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The Air Force launched an investigation. It did not dispute that Hensala is gay, but an investigating officer reported: "There is very strong evidence that Capt. Hensala made the homosexual statement hoping to trigger resignation and avoid his active duty commitment."

Hensala, however, said his coming out happened gradually, very reluctantly. "In 1988, he told his parents a few close friends.

But he said eventually he realized he could not expect patients to live their lives with integrity if he could not. "Being dishonest with co-workers flies in the face of what I was trying to be as a human being," he said.

In 1997, Hensala received an honorable discharge under the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and was ordered to reimburse the government \$68,536.50 for tuition, \$13,000 for books, \$150 for board, \$285 for equipment rental and \$555.72 for supplies.

Hensala sued in federal court May 18. Air Force spokesperson Maj. Chet Curtis said about 100 Air Force members who graduated from its medical program were discharged between January 1996 and July 1997 for being gay. All have been asked to repay the money. Most are doing so, he said.

Stacey Sobel, legal director for the Servicemembers' Defense Network, said many ousted gays pay back money for fear of receiving a bad credit rating or being denied a job. "They don't realize they can fight it."

She said Hensala's is the first lawsuit she knows of by any ousted gay service member against reimbursing the government for education costs.

Hong Kong closes Vietnamese refugee camp

HONG KONG (AP) — Hong Kong closed its last Vietnamese refugee camp Wednesday, ending the quarter-century boat people saga in the territory and leaving about 100 people homeless.

At midnight, security guards marched out of the remote camp at Pillar Point before officials pulled the front gate shut and hung a sign pronouncing its permanent closure.

The government decided in February to shut the camp and give residency to the Vietnamese refugees, calling it a humanitarian solution for them and their Hong Kong-born children who had been stuck in

the territory awaiting relocation to the West — some for up to two decades.

But the change has been difficult for some of the impoverished Vietnamese, who must find the means to survive in the affluent society that often is criticized as discriminatory to immigrants. Many are unemployed or work odd jobs.

Throughout the day, refugees carted TV sets, refrigerators, stereos and bags of belongings to their new homes from the camp, a collection of two- and three-story barracks that had provided them with free housing since 1982.

After the closure, more than 100 people who claim they cannot afford to move out defied orders and remained inside the camp. They want the government to give them housing and money to stay afloat.

Officials refused to say what they would do to the people who stayed behind, despite earlier threats that they would be kicked out.

"We will take legal and reasonable measures that the community will find reasonable," said Robert Chan, head of the government Civil Aid Service, which took over the camp Wednesday.

Police earlier searched the barracks for weapons to prevent violence.

Tsang Sing-san, 26, said his income from occasional construction jobs is not enough to pay rent.

"How can I leave? With that competition, I'm not able to get a place to live," Tsang, who came to Hong Kong on a boat in 1991.

The government has given some families moving allowances of about \$5,000 to \$1,460. Some got additional housing or welfare benefits.

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