

NEWS IN BRIEF

**British hostage pleads for help**

A weeping British hostage was shown pleading for help between the bars of a makeshift cage in a video that surfaced Wednesday, a sobering reminder of the grim reality for at least 18 foreign captives still held by Iraqi militants.

There is wide speculation the ransoms were paid for the freedom of a dozen hostages, including two Italian aid workers.

The new footage, first broadcast on the Arab news network Al-Jazeera and then posted on the Internet, showed Kenneth Bigley begging British Prime Minister Tony Blair to meet his captors' demands.

**White House reports on Bush**

President Bush never was disciplined while serving in the Texas Air National Guard, never failed a physical and never asked his father or family friends for help to get him into the guard during the Vietnam War, the White House said Wednesday.

The White House answers came in response to a dozen questions submitted by The Associated Press in light of new records detailing Bush's Guard service and allegations that have surfaced this election season.

The Texas Air National Guard stripped Bush of his pilot status in August 1972 for failing to take the annual medical exam required of all pilots. Former Air National Guard officials say it was rare for a pilot to skip his physical exam.

**Rocket ship has a wild ride**

Ignoring a warning to abort the flight, a test pilot took a stubby-looking rocket plane on a corkscrewing, white-knuckle ride past the edge of the atmosphere Wednesday, completing the first stage of a quest to win a \$10 million prize.

As spectators and controllers nervously watched from the ground, SpaceShipOne rolled dozens of times as it hurtled toward space at nearly three times the speed of sound. It reached an altitude of 64 miles over the Mojave Desert.

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