

Fraternity fire kills five, injures three

■ DEATH: A blaze gutted the University of North Carolina house hours before graduation

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — An early morning fraternity house fire killed five people Sunday, bringing tragedy to the University of North Carolina campus just hours before annual Mother's Day graduation ceremonies.

The cause of the blaze that gutted the interior of the Phi Gamma Delta house was not expected to be known for three or four days, said Fire Department spokeswoman Jan Cousins.

The identities of the dead were not released.

Ben Eubanks, 21, a junior and former president of the fraternity, was hospitalized in serious condition. Adam Jones, a 21-year-old junior and a member of the fraternity, was in fair condition; and Anne Glenn, 21, not enrolled in the university, was listed in critical condition.

Hospital officials would not disclose the nature of their injuries.

After the fire was doused, a search of the charred ruins for

any additional victims went slowly because of extensive damage and fears part of the three-story brick building might collapse.

By early evening, crews were working to shore up the first and second floors of the 80-year-old building, which had collapsed into the basement. Fire Chief Dan Jones expected the search to continue through part of the night.

The building did not have a sprinkler system, but one of the injured said he was awakened by a fire alarm. Jones would not say when the house was last inspected for fire safety.

At graduation ceremonies, chancellor Michael Hooker briefly mentioned the fire, offering prayers for those who were injured. He did not mention the deaths. Most of the 30,000 in attendance were unaware how bad the fire was.

Tim Reid, president of neighboring Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity, saw a blaze out of control when he woke up.

"We went to the third floor window and looked out and flames were leaping over the top of the building," said Reid, 22, of Southern Pines. "We could see the smoke coming out and

the flames coming out of the window. I knew it had to be bad. I was just hoping nobody was inside."

A party at the Phi Gamma Delta house Saturday night was still going strong when he went to bed about 1 a.m. Sunday, Reid said.

The Phi Gamma Delta chapter was placed on indefinite suspension in Nov. 1995 by its national office after chapter members sent prospective recruits a letter advertising strippers and saying their parties were so loaded with drunken sorority women that opportunities for sex were assured.

Hooker went to the fire scene following graduation ceremonies.

"We are profoundly saddened by the tragic fire this morning," Hooker said. "This is a loss being felt deeply by the entire community."

Firefighters found the building in flames when they reached the scene after it was reported shortly after 6 a.m., Jones said. The cause of the blaze wasn't immediately known.

A university counseling center was open to friends and family of fire victims, the school said.

109 feared dead in Everglades plane crash

■ DISASTER: The DC-9 ValuJet flight nose-dived eight minutes after take-off into a deep, murky swamp

MIAMI (AP) — No survivors, no bodies, no hope on Mother's Day.

Authorities on Sunday called off the search for possible survivors of the crash of ValuJet Flight 592, which nose-dived into the Everglades with 104 passengers and five crew members.

"One hundred and nine mothers that are not doing too good right now," Bill Boland muttered to a fellow ambulance driver at midmorning.

The DC-9 had been in the air only eight minutes on a Saturday afternoon flight to Atlanta when the crew reported smoke in the cockpit. They attempted to turn around but the plane crashed about 15 miles northwest of Miami International Airport. The source of the cockpit smoke was unknown.

The swamp yielded pieces of clothing Sunday, in addition to a family photo album and a floating airplane seat that were found Saturday.

"There's no evidence of the plane. It's gone," said Bret Rugg, 41, of Richmond, Ind., whose wife Terri was on the plane. He had taken his two sons, ages 5 and 11, to meet their mother on her return from a cruise she made as a travel agency owner.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," he said. Clearer pictures of the passengers emerged Sunday: a Baptist church organist and his wife on a dream vacation, a young man preparing for missionary work in his native Venezuela, a mother and her daughter who had become "real friends" in recent years.

Also among those on Flight 592 were San Diego Chargers running back Rodney Culver and his wife, Karen, of Woodstock, Ga.

"These are human beings," ValuJet Airlines Inc. President Lewis Jordan said of the victims at a Sunday morning news conference in Miami. "Every human being in every seat of the airplane is a life and a loved one with stories to tell, with friends, with places to go. It's Mother's Day weekend, we know that."

The discount airline, based in Atlanta, has had

at least three accidents since it began operations in 1993. The most serious was a runway fire last year that destroyed a plane and burned a flight attendant.

Workers at the remote crash site spent the morning trying to determine how to recover the remains and wreckage, including the airplane's flight data and cockpit voice recorders.

The wreckage was buried under waist-high water and layers of sawgrass and swamp muck — estimated to be up to 40 feet thick in places. Temperatures were in the mid-80s under steady, bright sunshine.

"If they're out of here before two weeks, I'll be surprised," said Metro-Dade Detective Ed Munn.

The Everglades — dubbed the River of Grass — is a desolate expanse of swamp covering much of southern Florida. The area is home to alligators, snakes and other wildlife and is accessible mostly by airboat.

Divers wore protective rubber suits after suffering irritated skin Saturday from aviation fuel and hydraulic fluid. They searched the muck by hand, unable to see more than a few inches in front of them in the water.

Jordan said he took full responsibility for the crash, but added there was no indication anything was wrong before the 27-year-old plane took off. A list of the plane's past problems showed nothing out of the ordinary, he said.

Federal Aviation Administration records showed the crashed jet had returned to airports seven times during the past two years because of various maintenance problems, from an oil leak to loss of cabin pressure.

"I have reviewed the list ... and saw such things as overheating of a constant speed drive, a pressurization problem and a door ajar," Jordan said. He said he found nothing "abnormal or shocking."

The plane had a thorough annual inspection in October and a routine inspection four days before the crash. But the FAA began a special investigation of the airline in February based on the company's rapid growth and several recent incidents.

Troubled online service given boost by takeover

NEW YORK (AP) — A group of investors announced Sunday they had acquired the troubled Prodigy Services Co. commercial online service from its owners, IBM Corp. and Sears, Roebuck and Co.

The takeover was led by Prodigy management, including president and chief executive officer Ed Bennett, and International Wireless Inc., a global communications company. Bennett will continue to serve in those positions.

Prodigy needs to invest heavily in new systems and

marketing to keep pace with its rivals, America Online and CompuServe.

"This gives us a real clear ownership structure, and the cloud around Prodigy is removed," said Bennett in a telephone interview Sunday. "The beleaguered, troublesome days for Prodigy are over."

The deal still must meet regulatory approval.

Under the deal, International Wireless of Cambridge, Mass., will own Prodigy with Bennett and other managers running the company.

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