

## News digest

**Woman dies after being bitten 1,625 times by ants**

**1** SARASOTA, Fla. — An 87-year-old nursing home patient with Alzheimer's disease died a day after she was bitten 1,625 times by ants as she lay in her bed, authorities said Thursday.

The Sarasota County medical examiner's office is investigating the case of Mary L. Morales Gay, who died last Friday at the Quality Health Care Center in North Port.

The official cause of death was awaiting toxicology tests, but Gay was bitten by either fire ants or red ants on her chest, upper arm, abdomen and back, Wilson Broussard, deputy chief medical examiner, said Thursday.

Lorraine Baeringer, administrative assistant at the home, had no comment. Pat Glynn of the state Agency for Health Care Administration said the home has had satisfactory ratings.

State regulators and the Department of Children and Families are also investigating.

Gay had been co-owner of a trucking company. Her son, Edgar W. Gay of Sarasota, declined comment.

In 1998, hundreds of fire ants killed a 66-year-old nursing home resident in Jackson, Miss. Health officials found no evidence of negligence.

Fire ants, which travel in colonies of hundreds and even thousands, usually avoid homes, but dry weather and heat can



drive them indoors. They pack a burning sting and attack when threatened.

**ABC jumps from third to first in television season**

**2** NEW YORK — Led by the game show sensation "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," ABC became the first network to bounce from third place to first in the television ratings in a single season.

"Millionaire" supplanted NBC's "ER" as the most popular program on television in the 1999-2000 season, even though it didn't join ABC's regular lineup until January.

The TV industry considered Wednesday the end of the season, with the long summer rerun sea-

son beginning Thursday.

ABC had an average of 14.27 million viewers in prime-time this year, a 20 percent increase over last year. CBS, last year's top network, averaged 12.42 million viewers, down 6 percent. NBC's 12.34 million average was down 4 percent from last year.

Fox had the biggest decline of the four major networks. Its average prime-time audience of 8.97 million was down 17 percent from the year before, according to Nielsen Media Research.

On the strength of professional wrestling, UPN saw a 36 percent increase to 3.92 million prime-time viewers. The WB network, suffering from the fickleness of teen-age viewers, was down 22

percent to 3.64 million viewers.

Although "Millionaire" clearly turned everyone's expectations upside down, ABC executives tried to downplay the notion that their schedule had little depth.

**Lack of fire managers faulted in burn gone awry**

**3** FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — Too many fire managers were gone from Grand Canyon National Park while the park was conducting a prescribed burn that eventually became a wildfire, according to investigators.

Because fire managers were sent to a fire that destroyed hundreds of homes in Los Alamos, N.M., and another large fire near Globe, Ariz., those who stayed behind at the canyon were forced to take on so many roles it diverted their attention, according to a National Park Service report obtained by the Arizona Daily Sun.

The plan for the prescribed burn also failed to say what actions officials at the scene should take if the fire grew out of control.

The fire set in late April blew out of control earlier this month and had charred 13,350 acres and forced the closure of the North Rim before it was fully contained Sunday. Officials spent \$6 million to fight it.

The team found no violations of park policy or fault with the way the park service conducted the controlled burn.

**Researchers identify virus that killed 106 in Asia**

**4** WASHINGTON — A virus that killed 106 people in outbreaks during 1998 and 1999 in Malaysia and Singapore has been identified as a new viral species capable of infecting both animals and humans.

A study appearing Friday in the journal Science said the virus has been named Nipah and researchers said it is closely related to another new virus called Hendra.

Together, the two viruses represent a new genus within the family of viruses known as Paramyxoviridae, said co-author Dr. William J. Bellini of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Unlike other members of the virus family, which generally infect only one type of animal, Nipah and Hendra are capable of infecting a variety of animals — dogs, cats, pigs, bats, horses and humans. Most animals recover from the virus, but it is lethal to about 40 percent of human patients, causing severe encephalitis, said Bellini.

Researchers said the virus can be spread to humans from the urine and mucus of infected ani-

mals. It causes respiratory symptoms in pigs and the animals can expel the virus in their cough. Bellini said that tropical fruit bats appear to be unharmed by the virus, but they are carriers and may possibly spread it.

**29 freed U.N. peacekeepers return to Sierra Leone**

**5** FREETOWN, Sierra Leone — Freed U.N. peacekeepers complained Thursday of harsh treatment at the hands of their rebel captors and said injured peacekeepers still being held are not being given medical attention.

The 29 U.N. peacekeepers, who were freed earlier this week on the border with neighboring Liberia, were flown back to Sierra Leone on Thursday to rejoin their units. Some 260 peacekeepers are still being held by the rebels.

The freed peacekeepers, all from Zambia, said their captive colleagues are not receiving proper medical treatment at the rebel camps and villages in eastern Sierra Leone.

One peacekeeper, who declined to give his name, said the injured were becoming weaker by the day due to a lack of care.

U.N. officials have put the number of wounded at 30 to 40. The freed peacekeepers said they could not give any figures because the captives are being held in several different places.

When the peacekeepers were captured, a group of 50 was crammed into a 15-seat bus and driven to a tiny village where they were kept for three weeks, the soldiers said.

Peacekeepers released earlier have spoken of being tied up, and receiving as little as one banana or one mango a day for food.

**Man parachutes from jet after hijacking**

**6** MANILA, Philippines — A crying man tried to hijack a Philippine Airlines jet carrying 291 people Thursday, then robbed everyone and jumped out of the plane wearing a parachute.

The hijacker moved from bathroom to bathroom toward the front of the Airbus 330, complaining of a stomachache, finally reaching the cockpit, where he announced the hijacking minutes before the scheduled landing, passengers said.

Armed with a grenade and a pistol, the man ordered the pilot of PAL Flight PR812 to return to Davao City in the southern Philippines. The pilot responded that he did not have enough fuel, Manila airport general manager Antonio Gana said. Davao City is about 600 miles from the capital, Manila.

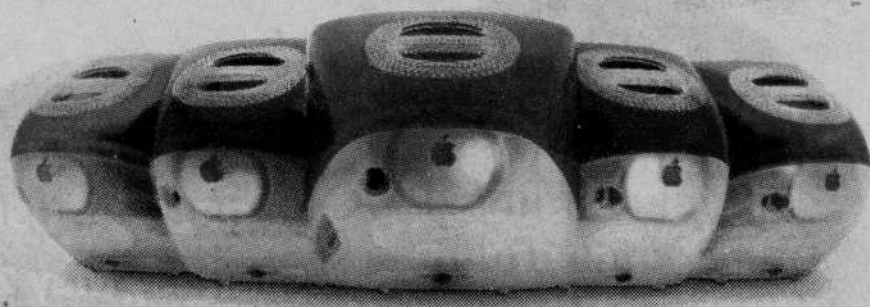
At one point, the weeping and distraught hijacker fired a shot inside the cockpit, perhaps accidentally, said Emmanuel Generoso, one of the three pilots aboard, as tired-looking passengers streamed off the plane behind him.

"He was very tense," Generoso said. "I don't think there's any political implications there. He had family problems, he needed the money, so that's what happened."

The plane was depressurized to permit the hijacker to jump with a homemade parachute while it circled 28 miles from Manila at 6,000 feet, PAL spokesman Rolando Estabillo said. Police searched the hilly area after he jumped.

The Associated Press

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