

World and Nation

U.S. agents sting money launderers

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — Federal authorities have smashed a billion-dollar international operation laundering drug money and forced Colombia's Medellin cartel to alter the way it handles drug profits, the Justice Department said Wednesday.

Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, FBI Director William Sessions and other top law enforcement officials said their "Operation Polar Cap" has ended with charges against 127 people and two Latin American banks.

Thornburgh called the investigation "the largest money-laundering crackdown ever carried out by the federal government."

Agents seized a half ton of cocaine and \$45 million in cash, jewels and real estate and filed civil actions in an effort to seize as much as \$412 million more in assets of the banks, Banco de Occidente of Panama and Banco de Occidente of Colombia,

that are deposited in U.S. bank accounts.

The operation, reaching across the United States into South America and to England, had direct ties to the Medellin drug cartel of Colombia and laundered \$1.2 billion over two years, Justice Department officials said.

The cartel is responsible for as much as 80 percent of the cocaine flowing into the United States, according to federal drug officials.

"There is no more effective way to deal with the business of drug trafficking than to take the profit out of it. That's what has happened with Operation Polar Cap," Thornburgh said at a news conference.

"I think it's fair to describe this operation as a very hostile takeover of a major money-laundering operation," he said.

Some of the defendants were still being sought Wednesday, including a Colombian holed up in a bank in

Panama to elude Panamanian Defense Forces seeking to arrest him for U.S. authorities.

U.S. officials said the laundering operation played a significant role in the handling of the cartel's illegal drug proceeds and was known within the drug world as "La Mina," or "The Mine."

Agents learned of the ring while operating an undercover money-laundering operation of their own in Atlanta as part of a joint investigation by federal agencies, including the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA).

Authorities said that undercover agents received complaints from alleged drug-world figures that they were moving too slowly in their laundering, or processing the money into seemingly legitimate accounts.

The agents were told La Mina could get the money by wire from Los Angeles to Panama within 48

hours, according to court documents released with the indictments.

Federal agents then expanded their investigation into that operation, using electronic intercepts, surveillance and pursuit of financial paper trails.

Thornburgh said that while it is difficult to determine how much impact the federal action will have on the Medellin cartel, "common sense tells me when you disrupt an operation that has laundered over a billion dollars in two years, you're going to force some adjustment in their operation."

DEA administrator John Lawn said that one indication of the effect was seen immediately by drug agents. When La Mina was forced out of business, he said, "the phone was ringing off the hook" at the undercover money-laundering operation that was continuing in Atlanta, with requests for use of their services.

Official says Exxon tanker met structural standards

From Associated Press reports

WASHINGTON — The disabled Exxon Valdez had complied with all modern construction standards for oil tankers, but it tore open in Alaskan waters because no design is immune to the consequences of human error, a Coast Guard official said Wednesday.

A spokesman said, however, that the Coast Guard plans no disciplinary action against any of the tanker's officers unless the results of an investigation by another federal agency of the oil spill show it is warranted.

Investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board looking into the nation's worst oil spill said they were focusing on actions of the ship's captain, Joseph Hazelwood. Exxon officials said he had left the bridge to his third mate when the ship hit a charted reef Friday and spilled 10.1 million gallons of oil into Prince William Sound.

"It's a very new ship. I don't see any deficiencies at all," said Joseph Angelo, assistant chief of the Coast Guard's Merchant Vessel Inspection and Documentation Division.

U.S. supports cease-fire

WASHINGTON — The United States on Wednesday welcomed a call by the Arab League for a cease-fire in Lebanon and urged all warring groups to comply.

"We strongly support that call, and we share the Arab League's concern about the grave situation in Lebanon," said a State Depart-

News in Brief

ment statement. "The shelling must stop and the land and sea blockades must end."

Syrian gunners and their Druse allies have been trading artillery fire with Christian army units in Beirut since March 8 in the worst sectarian fighting the country has known in four years.

The Christians, headed by Gen. Michel Aoun, have blockaded southern ports used by Moslem militias, and the Moslems have retaliated with a counter-blockade of the Christian enclave in the north.

Prison officials take action

SANTA CATARINA PINOLA, Guatemala — Authorities tried to end a 4-day-old standoff at a prison farm Wednesday by cutting off water and power to rebel inmates holed up along with hundreds of their friends and relatives.

"It's the only way we can pressure them," said Carlos Ramos Moncada, inspector general of prisons. "If we don't, they could stay inside for days or weeks."

He said the water and power were cut off before dawn. Witnesses said food was also running low in the rebel-held sections of the Pavon prison farm 15 miles east of Guatemala City.

The mutineers reportedly were bickering about how to respond to the government's latest negotiating offer.

Czechoslovak teenagers hijack airplane

From Associated Press reports

FRANKFURT, West Germany — Two Czechoslovak teenagers shot their way onto a jetliner Wednesday in Prague and ordered it to the United States, but the crew convinced them it couldn't fly that far and they gave up in Frankfurt.

They surrendered when American military would not let them enter the U.S. Air Force base adjacent to Frankfurt's commercial airport.

Police said no one was hurt and the incident ended peacefully less than three hours after its violent start

in the Czechoslovak capital, where nearly all passengers were freed.

Witnesses at Ruzyně Airport in Prague said the teenagers took a woman hostage, crashed through a glass wall of the VIP lounge, fired several shots and threatened a stewardess.

About 100 people were reported to be on Tupolev-154 of the Hungarian airline Malev when the hijackers, aged 15 and 16, seized it at about 10 a.m.

Oswald Neumann, a Frankfurt police spokesman, said passengers

reported that one youth fired a "warning shot" out the door of the plane before takeoff that "was not aimed at anyone . . . went into the air."

Official Hungarian and Czechoslovak news agencies gave the ages of the hijackers and said they initially demanded to be flown to the United States.

The Hungarian agency MTI said Lajos Taba, Hungarian consul general in Prague, boarded the aircraft and negotiated the release of 82 passengers, including all women

and children, trading himself for them.

Taba was among the 11 passengers when the plane landed in Frankfurt.

MTI said Hungarian authorities were in touch with West German security officials and were considering an extradition request.

Hans Neitzel, chief spokesman for the Frankfurt police, said he did not know the hijackers' motives.

"They said they wanted to go to America, but why they wanted to go, whether they have relatives there or what, we don't know," he said.

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Lewis

said when he admitted his favorite movie was "Casablanca."

Lewis has been in three Lab Theater shows and two shows for UNC's Department of Dramatic Arts. Although he enjoys acting, Lewis said he's never considered it for a career. "I never had that (driving ambition) in my belly."

Lewis' musical tastes range from classical to Bruce Springsteen. His favorite artists now are Frank Sinatra and Roy Orbison, whom he saw in concert last summer. At times, Lewis prefers opera, though. "Opera is the best music to study because I don't know the words, so I don't sing along."

One of his former roommates, Steve Greenwood, said Lewis knew the words to everything and that he does sing along.

They kept a Mickey Mouse basketball hoop in their room to use for study breaks, Greenwood said. Every time a person hit a shot Mickey's eyes moved and a bell would ring, he said. "Brien is a terrible shooter."

Even though they played every day, Lewis' game never improved, he said.

Living with Lewis taught Greenwood to keep an open mind about things, he said. "People are attracted to Brien because he is so accessible. They are attracted by his enthusiasm and sincerity. It's a feeling you get

from him. He is always so positive.

"I don't think you can find anyone who doesn't have positive things to say about him. It's not so much what he conveys as what he brings out in other people."

Laura Washburn, a junior education major from Burlington, said she met Lewis through student government. Lewis is a person who makes people wonder if he is really as nice as he seems, she said.

During the campaign, she realized Lewis was sincere in what he said and did. Washburn became ill during the latter part of the campaign. Even though Lewis was under pressure and extremely busy, he still found time to come visit her and bring her flowers and candy, she said.

"He's one of the most selfless people I've ever met." Lewis is secure, responsible, confident and mature, Washburn said. During the campaign, he was the person who kept everything in perspective.

"I was more emotionally wrapped up in winning," Washburn said. "But Brien thought whatever would be, would be. He just wanted to run a clean campaign and get issues that needed attention in the public eye."

Washburn said she didn't think Lewis was a typical student body president. "He doesn't have the look."

His campaign staff was a very diverse group, Washburn said. Lewis represents the average student on campus.

Because Lewis is Canadian, he knew few people on campus, which may have worked against him in the election, Washburn said.

"Every person he knows here now he formed a friendship with since he got here (UNC). It's amazing to me that he won the campus over that quickly."

Getting Brien Lewis to talk about himself is no easy task, either. "He doesn't think of himself as successful; he just thinks he's been very lucky and is grateful for that," Washburn said.

He is a very humble person, she said. "He listens to people and makes them feel that what they have to say is important."

Lewis said he was unsure of his career plans, but he would like to do something involving public service. "It's corny, but it's true. I really want to make the world a better place."

Coates

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She also read an excerpt of a letter from Thomas Wolfe to her husband. "And you, Albert, who carries so much hope home with you, will do your best."

Other speakers gave Gladys Coates partial credit for her husband's accomplishments. Douglass Hunt,

special assistant to the chancellor, said it was she who polished and refined her husband's writings.

Coates was one of the brightest men at UNC, said William Cochrane, senior adviser for the U.S. Senate Rules Committee. "I've always suspected him of being a true genius."



Gladys Coates speaks on her late husband's accomplishments

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