

Jodi Arias Convicted Of First-Degree Murder

PHOENIX (AP) — Jodi Arias spent 18 days on the stand sharing intimate, emotional and oftentimes X-rated details of her life before a rapt television and online audience. She had hoped it all might convince a jury that she killed her one-time boyfriend in self-defense.

But the eight men and four women on the panel didn't buy it, convicting Arias of first-degree murder after only about 15 hours of deliberations. Jurors will return to court Thursday to begin the next phase of the trial that could set the stage for Arias receiving a death sentence.

The case elevated the unknown waitress and aspiring photographer to a household name, with a real-life story of love, betrayal and murder far more alluring than any made-for-TV movie. The crime itself was enough to grab headlines: Arias, a 32-year-old high school dropout, shot Travis Alexander in the forehead, stabbed him nearly 30 times and slit his throat from ear to ear, leaving the motivational speaker and businessman nearly decapitated.

She claimed he attacked her and she fought for her life. Prosecutors said she killed out of jealous rage after Alexander wanted to end their affair and planned to take a trip to Mexico with another woman.

Syrian Media Blames Internet Outage On Cable

BEIRUT (AP) — A problem with a fiber optics cable was responsible for an Internet outage that cut off civil war-ravaged Syria from the rest of the world for nearly 20 hours, state media said Wednesday.

Internet service stopped abruptly Tuesday evening, prompting speculation that the regime had pulled the plug, possibly as a cover for military action. However, no large-scale military offensives were reported Wednesday and the opposition did not accuse the regime of sabotage.

In the past, the regime halted Internet service in selected areas during government offensives to disrupt communication among rebel fighters. The last nationwide outage, for two days in November, coincided with a major military operation near the capital, Damascus, and its international airport.

A U.S.-based Web watcher said the problem would have to occur somewhere inside Syria for the entire country to be affected, although it was impossible to tell from a distance exactly what happened.

Jim Cowie of Renesys, a company that monitors online traffic, said Syria is serviced by three underwater cables, but a problem in one of those would not be sufficient to cut off Internet nationwide.

Italy Crews Search For Missing After Ship Crash

ROME (AP) — Italian prosecutors placed the captain of the *Jolly Nero* cargo ship under investigation Wednesday for alleged manslaughter after his vessel slammed into the dock at Genoa's busy port and toppled the control tower into the harbor, killing at least seven people.

As rescue teams in diving suits searched for two other missing people, officials began piecing together how the 40,000-ton container ship could have sideswiped the port's control tower when weather and sea conditions were "perfect" on Tuesday night. The focus was on whether human error or a technical malfunction was to blame.

The crash occurred around 11 p.m. as the *Jolly Nero* was backing out of Genoa's port accompanied by two tugboats and with a harbor pilot on its bridge. At the same time, a shift change was taking place among employees at the control tower, meaning more people were in the building than usual.

"This event is unbelievable because we had the best weather navigation conditions," said Luigi Merlo, president of Genoa's port authority.

Transport Minister Maurizio Lupi told Parliament that given the "perfect" weather conditions, possible causes of the crash could include an engine malfunction or problems with the cables between the container ship and the tugs guiding it. He said investigators — both criminal and from his own ministry — were also looking into possible mistakes with the maneuver itself or with the speed in which the ship backed out of its berth and turned around to leave the port.

Wrigley Stopping Sales Of Caffeinated Gum

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wrigley says it is taking a new caffeinated gum off the market temporarily as the Food and Drug Administration investigates the safety of added caffeine.

The company said Wednesday that it has stopped new sales and marketing of Alert Energy Caffeine Gum "out of respect" for the agency, which said it would investigate the health effects of added caffeine in foods just as Wrigley rolled out Alert late last month. A stick of the gum is equivalent to half a cup of coffee.

"After discussions with the FDA, we have a greater appreciation for its concern about the proliferation of caffeine in the nation's food supply," said Wrigley North America President Casey Keller in a statement to The Associated Press. "There is a need for changes in the regulatory framework to better guide the consumers and the industry about the appropriate level and use of caffeinated products."

Keller said the company has paused production and sales of the gum to give the agency time to regulate caffeine-added products.

Michael Taylor, FDA's deputy commissioner of foods, said Wrigley's decision to stop production for now "demonstrates real leadership and commitment to the public health." He said the company made the move after a series of discussions with the agency.

Former U.S. Official Describes Libya Attack

BY DONNA CASSATA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former top diplomat in Libya on Wednesday delivered a riveting minute-by-minute account of the chaotic events during the deadly assault on the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi last September, with a 2 a.m. call from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and confusion about the fate of U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens.

In a slow, halting and sometimes emotional voice, Gregory Hicks, the deputy chief of mission who was in Tripoli, described for a House committee how a routine day on Sept. 11, 2012, quickly devolved as insurgents launched two nighttime attacks on the facility in eastern Libya, killing Stevens and three other Americans.

The hours-long hearing produced no major revelation while reviving disputes over the widely debunked comments made by U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice five days after the attacks and the inability of the U.S. military to respond quickly.

"I don't think there's a smoking gun today. I don't think there's a lukewarm slingshot," said Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis.

The session exposed bitter partisan divisions as Republicans who are pressing ahead with the investigation eight months after the attacks insist the Obama administration is covering up information and Democrats decry politicization of a national security issue.

A scathing independent review in December faulted the State Department for inadequate security at the mission, but it has not been the final word. Nor has congressional testimony from former Obama Cabinet officials and military leaders.

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GREGORY HICKS

In a jam-packed hearing room where Republicans and Democrats furiously traded charges, the soft-spoken Hicks presented a lengthy recollection of the events and expressed frustration with a military that he argued could have prevented the second attack.

Hicks and two other State Department witnesses criticized the review conducted by former top diplomat Thomas Pickering and retired Gen. Mike Mullen, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Their complaints centered on a report they consider incomplete, with individuals who weren't interviewed and a focus on the assistant secretary level and lower.

Hicks said he was watching television at his villa in Tripoli when he first got word of the initial attack. He listened to two messages on his cell phone and Stevens' chilling words.

"Greg, we're under attack," the ambassador said.

Hicks described a series of phone calls to the State Department and Libyan officials, frustrating efforts to find out what was happening in Benghazi, and a call from Clinton.

"Secretary of State Clinton called me along with her senior staff ... and she asked me what was going on. And, I briefed her on developments," he

said. "Most of the conversation was about the search for Ambassador Stevens. It was also about what we were going to do with our personnel in Benghazi, and I told her that we would need to evacuate, and that was — she said that was the right thing to do."

He recalled another phone call from the Libyan prime minister with word that Stevens was dead.

"I think it is the saddest phone call I have ever had in my life," Hicks said.

Hicks said that shortly after he was told Stevens was dead, unidentified Libyans called Hicks' staff from the phone that had been with the ambassador that night. These Libyans said Stevens was with them, and U.S. officials should come fetch him, Hicks said. Hicks said he believed Stevens' body was at a hospital at that point, but he could not be certain.

"We suspected we were being baited into a trap," Hicks told the committee, so the U.S. personnel did not follow the callers' instructions. "We did not want to send our people into an ambush," he testified.

Republicans at the hearing focused on the talking points used by Rice on the Sunday talk shows in which she said the attacks appeared to be associated with demonstrations in Egypt and Libya over an anti-Islam video.

Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., said Rice's comments contradicted statements by Libyan leaders and others who called the attacks pre-meditated assaults by terrorists.

Gowdy said Rice's comments "perpetuated a demonstrably false narrative." Hicks, asked his reaction to the Rice's remarks on the talk shows, said: "I was stunned. My jaw dropped and I was embarrassed."

Commander Cites 'Rot' In Nuclear Force

BY ROBERT BURNS
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel demanded more information Wednesday after the Air Force removed 17 launch officers from duty at a nuclear missile base in North Dakota over what a commander called "rot" in the force. The Air Force struggled to explain, acknowledging concern about an "attitude problem" but telling Congress the weapons were secure.

Hagel reacted strongly after The Associated Press reported the unprecedented sidelining of the officers at Minot Air Force Base, N.D., where one of their commanders complained of "such rot" that even the willful violation of safety rules — including a possible compromise of launch codes — was tolerated.

The AP quoted from an internal email written by Lt. Col. Jay Folds, deputy commander of the 91st Operations Group, which is responsible for all Minuteman 3 missile launch crews at Minot. He lamented the remarkably poor reviews they received in a March inspection. Their missile launch skills were rated "marginal," which the Air Force told the AP was the equivalent of a "D" grade.

"We are, in fact, in a crisis right now," Folds wrote in the email to his subordinates.

In response, the Air Force said the problem does not suggest a lack of proper control over the nuclear missiles but rather was a



Hagel

symptom of turmoil in the ranks.

"The idea that we have people not performing to the standard we expect will never be good and we won't tolerate it," Gen. Mark Welsh, the service's top general, said when questioned about the problem at a congressional hearing on budget issues.

Underlying the Minot situation is a sense among some that the Air Force's nuclear mission is a dying field, as the government considers further reducing the size of the U.S. arsenal.

Welsh noted that because there are a limited number of command positions to which missile launch officers can aspire within the nuclear force, those officers tend to believe they have no future.

"That's actually not the case, but that's the view when you're in the operational force," Welsh said. "We have to deal with that."

Hagel himself, before he was defense secretary, signed a plan put forward a year ago by the private group Global Zero to elimi-

nate the Air Force's intercontinental ballistic missiles and to eventually eliminate all nuclear weapons. At his Senate confirmation hearing he said he supports President Barack Obama's goal of zero nuclear weapons but only through negotiations.

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