

Transplant Gives New Face To Firefighter

NEW YORK (AP) — A volunteer firefighter badly burned in a 2001 blaze has received the most extensive face transplant ever, covering his skull and much of his neck, a New York hospital announced Monday.

The surgery took place in August at the NYU Langone Medical Center. The patient, 41-year-old Patrick Hardison, is still undergoing physical therapy at the hospital but plans to return home to Senatobia, Mississippi, in time for Thanksgiving.

The surgery has paved the way for him to regain normal vision, and in an interview last week he said that will let him accomplish a major goal: “I’ll start driving again.”

More than two dozen face transplants have been performed worldwide since the first one in France in 2005. Dr. Eduardo Rodriguez, who led the surgical team that did Hardison’s transplant and recently wrote a review of the field, said Hardison’s is by far the most extensive performed successfully in terms of the amount of tissue transferred.

The transplant extends from the top of the head, over Hardison’s skull and down to the collarbones in front; in back, it reaches far enough down that only a tiny patch of Hardison’s original hair remains — its color matched by the dark blond hair growing on his new scalp. The transplant includes both ears.

Puerto Ricans Fear For Their Health

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — An incurable disease has given Jose Gonzalez Ortiz the health of an old man at age 42, and the collapsing Puerto Rican health system only adds to his pain.

He was refused the \$300 worth of monthly medications he needs to treat the degenerative illness known as Lou Gehrig’s disease that attacks the cells that control his muscles. His health care plan won’t pay for the respiratory equipment that doctors say would ease his breathing. Unable to walk, he lurches about on a walker donated by his church because he was denied a wheelchair for his amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS.

“I’m so angry and frustrated,” the former prison guard said at his home in the seaside town of Arecibo.

Despite the Christmas tree and lights his wife put up early to cheer up their home, this is a gloomy season for Gonzalez and 2.37 million of other Puerto Ricans who rely on a health system funded by Medicaid and Medicare.

The island is bracing for steep funding cuts to federal health care plans that serve nearly 70 percent of the U.S. territory’s 3.5 million people. Local officials have been talking with the federal government about the proposed funding loss, but believe they will be implemented nevertheless.

Game Over In Dreary ‘Mockingjay Part 2’

“The Hunger Games” movies have unfolded in a relative blitzkrieg — four movies in four years — and in a fan-fueled fever that has masked some seriously silly political allegory with the thrill of survival games and the awesome star power of Jennifer Lawrence. In the final installment, “The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 2,” the game is over.

Having left behind the “arena” — a wooded realm where teenagers from across the districts of the totalitarian Panem are set against each other in a televised kill-or-be-killed death match — at the conclusion of 2013’s “Catching Fire,” “Mockingjay” moves into a greater war, where Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), the reluctant participant plucked out of the mining region of District 12, discovers a wider network of like-minded rebels.

In part two, the march toward the Capitol takes on an air of inevitable victory as the revolution, led by President Alma Coin (Julianne Moore), contemplates power after the expected fall of the dictator Coriolanus Snow (Donald Sutherland). Wary of replacing one corruption with another, an increasingly grave Katniss discovers the truth of that old maxim: revolution is easy; democracy is difficult; and stretching the thin conceits of “The Hunger Games” into four films is even harder.

The pop pleasures of the early installments (the best of which was “Catching Fire”) are gone in the gray-and-gloomy part two of “Mockingjay.” All the color and vibrancy of the series has been drained away; a sizable chunk of action takes place in the sewer as Katniss and a band of rebels, navigating various traps, stealthily storm toward Snow, with plans to assassinate him.

From the start, though, it’s clear “Mockingjay Part 2” is neither intended for critics nor newcomers. It’s for the fans of Suzanne Collins’ books, to which the franchise has slavishly sworn its fidelity. “Mockingjay Part 2,” directed by Francis Lawrence (who has helmed all but the first film) and penned by Danny Strong, Peter Craig and Collins, picks up where the last film left off, with barely a glance backward.

Viral Review Triggers Run On Labelle Pies

Two million pounds of sweet potatoes. That’s what it’s going to take to get Patti LaBelle’s suddenly famous sweet potato pie back onto shelves at Wal-Mart.

Which means the pie that became a viral sensation during the weekend — selling roughly one every second — after a customer sang its praise in a YouTube video may not be back in time to grace your Thanksgiving table. Not that Wal-Mart isn’t trying. “There’s a lot of moving parts. The suppliers have been working all weekend,” Kerry Robinson, vice president for bakery and deli at Wal-Mart, said Monday.

“We need something like 2 million pounds of sweet potatoes, and that’s not something easy to get,” she said.

The sweet potato surge started Thursday, the day after James Wright posted a video of himself eating a slice of the pie, which Wal-Mart launched in September. In the video — now viewed millions of times — Wright bursts into LaBelle song and dance as he eats. Within 24 hours, social media was buzzing about Wright and the pie, and Wal-Mart stock was running low.

“We swept everything we had right into the stores to supply the demand, including our Christmas volume, so they have everything we’ve got,” Robinson said.

Mayor Seeks Investigation Into Shooting

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The mayor of Minneapolis on Monday asked for a federal civil rights investigation into the weekend shooting of a black man by a police officer during an apparent struggle.

Mayor Betsy Hodges said she wrote to the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and to the U.S. attorney for Minnesota seeking the investigation in the “interest of transparency and community confidence.” The state’s Bureau of Criminal Apprehension is already conducting a criminal investigation, but Hodges said the city needs “all the tools we have available to us.”

Authorities have released few details about the shooting, which has angered some community members after witnesses said the man was handcuffed when he was shot. Police said their initial information showed the man, a suspect in an assault, was not handcuffed. He was taken to a hospital after the shooting, and his family says he is on life support.

The incident sparked protests Sunday and an overnight encampment at the north Minneapolis police precinct near the site of the shooting. Community members and activists called for a federal investigation, as well as for authorities to release video of the incident and the officer’s identity.

Protests continued Monday, with a few hundred people gathering at an evening rally outside the same precinct, beating a drum and chanting for justice. At least eight tents were set up outside, and a handful of protesters were sitting behind glass doors in the foyer, including one who was knitting.

France IDs Top Paris Attacks Figure, Seeks Unity To Bomb IS

BY GREG KELLER
Associated Press

PARIS — France identified a 27-year-old Belgian who once boasted about killing “infidels” and fought for the Islamic State group in Syria as the mastermind of the Paris attacks, and President Francois Hollande vowed Monday to forge a united coalition capable of defeating the jihadists at home and abroad.

Addressing lawmakers after France observed a minute of silence honoring the 129 people killed and 350 wounded, Hollande said the victims came from at least 19 nations, and the international community, led by the United States and Russia, must overcome their deep-seated divisions over Syria to destroy Islamic State on its home turf.

“Friday’s acts of war were decided and planned in Syria. They were organized in Belgium and perpetrated on our soil with French complicity with one specific goal: to sow fear and to divide us,” Hollande told Parliament in a rare joint session convened at the Palace of Versailles.

“Syria has become the biggest factory of terrorism the world has ever known and the international community is still too divided and too incoherent.”

As he spoke, thousands gathered around candlelit memorials at the Place de la Republique square and beneath the Eiffel Tower, which like many top attractions in one of the world’s most-visited cities reopened for business Monday in a defiant spirit. The tower was bathed in red, white and blue floodlights of the French tricolor, with the city’s centuries-old slogan — “Tossed but not sunk,” suggesting an unsinkable city braving stormy seas — projected in white lights near its base.

French and other Western intelligence agencies face an urgent challenge to track down the surviving members of the three Islamic State units who inflicted the unprecedented



CAROLYN COLE/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

Members of the French Foreign Legion guard near the Eiffel Tower on Monday, Nov. 16 in Paris.

ed bloodshed in France and, perhaps more importantly, to target their distant commanders in IS-controlled parts of Syria.

A French security official said anti-terror intelligence officials had identified Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a Belgian of Moroccan descent, as chief architect of the Friday the 13th attacks on a rock concert, a soccer game and popular nightspots in one of Paris’ trendiest districts.

The official cited chatter from IS figures that Abaaoud had recommended a concert as an ideal target for inflicting maximum casualties, as well as electronic communications between Abaaoud and one of the Paris attackers who blew himself up.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive investigation.

Abaaoud came to public attention last year by boasting in an IS propaganda video about his pride in piling the dead bodies of “infidel” enemies into a trailer. Anti-terror agencies previously linked him to a series of abortive shooting plots this year in

Belgium and France, including a planned attack on a passenger train that was thwarted by American passengers who overpowered the lone gunman.

French police have used emergency powers to conduct 168 searches since Sunday night that netted 127 arrests and 31 weapons.

French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said police seized a Kalashnikov assault rifle, three automatic pistols and a bulletproof vest from a suspected arms dealer with jihadist sympathies, and a rocket launcher and other military-grade gear from his parents’ home.

But police have yet to announce the capture of anyone suspected of direct involvement in Friday’s slaughter. Seven attackers died — six after detonating suicide belts and a seventh from police gunfire — but Iraqi intelligence officials told The Associated Press that its sources indicated 19 participated in the attack and five others provided hands-on logistical support.

French police accidentally permitted the suspected driv-

er of one group of gunmen, 26-year-old Salah Abdeslam, to avoid arrest at the border Saturday and cross to his native Belgium. On Monday, Belgian police in balaclavas, gas masks and body armor raided Abdeslam’s suspected hideout in the Molenbeek district of Brussels but came out empty-handed.

Abdeslam’s brother, Brahim, was among the suicide bombers and killed one civilian after blowing himself up outside a restaurant. Police in Molenbeek arrested another brother, Mohamed, but freed him Monday without charge.

After he left police custody, Mohamed Abdeslam told reporters that his family couldn’t believe that both of his brothers were jihadists. He said all three siblings grew up in Belgium and seemingly were content with life in the West.

“I have not been involved in any way with what happened on Friday the 13th in Paris. We are an open-minded family. We never had any problem with justice,” he said.

US Says It Destroyed 116 Islamic State Fuel Trucks

BY ROBERT BURNS
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — In a new twist to an intensifying campaign to squeeze Islamic State oil revenues, U.S. warplanes have destroyed 116 oil-hauling trucks in eastern Syria that were a key part of a smuggling operation that brings the group an estimated \$1.4 million a day.

The strike conducted Sunday and announced Monday was the first of its kind in more than a year of U.S.-led airstrikes in Syria. Four A-10 Thunderbolt II attack planes and two AC-130 Spectre gunships pounded the trucks as they clustered near Abu Kamal, a town close to the Iraqi border.

U.S. officials previously had said they avoided attacking fuel trucks out of concern for civilian casualties.

Navy Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said that in an effort to warn the truck drivers to leave the area in advance of Sunday’s attacks, leaflets were dropped and coalition planes conducted low-level “show of force” flights over the site.

Davis said the coalition had determined that more needed to be done to inhibit the Islamic State’s generation of oil revenues in Syria and Iraq. The Treasury Department said last year that the group earned nearly \$1 million a day from illicit oil sales; the Pentagon believes that sum has risen to nearly \$1.4 million a day. Since the earliest days of the U.S.-led bombing campaign, some parts of the Islamic State’s oil infrastructure have been attacked, but the effort is now intensifying.

“This part of it was designed to attack

the distribution component of ISIL’s oil smuggling operation,” Davis said, referring to attacking the fuel trucks. “ISIL is stealing oil from the people of Iraq and Syria to fund its campaign of terror.”

Although Sunday’s strikes came just two days after the Paris attacks for which the Islamic State had claimed responsibility, Pentagon officials said there was no direct connection between the two events.

The attacks were part of a broader U.S.-led coalition campaign to cripple a key source of revenue for the Islamic State. Davis said it would take “some time” to fully realize the long-term effects of targeting key elements of the oil network.

“In the short term we know we are disrupting a significant source of funding that’s being used to kill innocent people,” he said.



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