

Air Force sending surplus chimps to controversial researchers

By Jennifer Lee
The Washington Post

They launched a glamorous but hazardous career at the dawn of the space age. The Air Force chimpanzees captivated millions with their snazzy astrotrips and spacecraft maneuvers during two 1961 journeys into space.

But in the decades since, the astrochimps and their descendants became military dead weight. Earlier this month, the Air Force officially announced 141 chimps would be retired from active duty next year, victims of military belt-tightening and downsizing.

The Air Force has faced a challenge shared by scientific institutions: a surplus of ex-research chimps and few places for them to go once they have outlived their usefulness.

"Typically the Air Force auctions off excess equipment," said Col. Jack Blackhurst, project manager for the chimpanzee divestment. "In this case, because of the number of chimpanzees and the fact there aren't a whole lot of interested organizations, it was a much more difficult problem."

After a controversial bidding process to seek caretakers for the primates, the Air Force announced 30 chimps will be retired to Primarily Primates, a private sanctuary in San Antonio, Tex. The 111 others will enter civilian life as biomedical research subjects with the Coulston Foundation, a facility based in Alamogordo, N.M., which has come under intense scrutiny since it was established in 1993.

The Coulston Foundation has been charged twice by the U.S. Department of Agriculture with alleged violations of the Animal Welfare Act related to chimp deaths, said Jamie Ambrosi, a spokesman for the USDA. In October 1993 three chimps died overnight after the room temperature soared to 140 degrees following a thermostat failure. The foundation negotiated a settlement in 1996 for \$40,000, half of which was to be used to improve the facilities. Last March, the USDA filed a second complaint based on the deaths of two chimpanzees.

The founder of the facility, 83-year-old pathologist Frederick Coulston, has been the subject of attack by animal welfare groups for ideas including farming chimpanzees for their blood and organs.

The foundation vigorously defends its record, saying it has been the target of a "very deliberate, very organized smear campaign." "There is not anybody who cares for chimpanzees any better than

we do. We pioneer in it," said Coulston Foundation spokesman Don McKinney. "Chimps are mortal creatures. They have accidents. If you look at the number of deaths in any given year, as a percentage of population we are probably far lower than the human population for D.C."

The Air Force, which has leased chimps to Coulston for several years, supports the foundation's claims of safety.

"I would say that in the case of both winning offers, Coulston and Primarily Primates, they provided convincing evidence that they had the ability to take care of chimpanzees," Blackhurst said.

The two other organizations bidding for the chimps, Chimp Haven and the Institute of Captive Chimpanzee Care and Well-Being, had prominent endorsers, such as Jane Goodall, but were unable to raise the \$10.6 million estimated to be necessary to support the chimps.

Caught in the wild, the original Air Force chimps played a critical role during the 1950s and 1960s in testing the limits of human endurance under flight conditions such as ejection impacts, G-forces and sleep deprivation. Two chimps, Ham and Enos, attained cultural eminence as "astrochimps" with space shots in 1961.

But beginning in the 1970s, the chimps were bumped aside by crash dummies. Computer sensory devices allowed for more detailed data and "the mannequins don't require day-to-day care," Blackhurst said.

The cost of caring for chimps can add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars over a 40- to 50-year average lifespan. Before deciding to divest, the Air Force leased the chimpanzees for short periods to research institutions such as the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration and private companies.

The Coulston Foundation's chimp population hovers around 650, or more than a third of all the research chimps in the United States. The foundation says it is building a pool of chimpanzees for an expected surge in research on aging. However, earlier this year the National Institute on Aging, a division of the NIH, declared there was no scientific demand for a center for aging chimpanzees.

Rep. James C. Greenwood, R-Pa., plans to introduce chimp sanctuary legislation when Congress reconvenes. "Until there are those kinds of resources, there are going to be chimpanzees in facilities like ours where chimpanzees are basically being warehoused," said Thomas Insel, director of Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center.

Jamaica sets hanging as death penalty gains favor in Caribbean

By Serge F. Kovaleski
The Washington Post

KINGSTON, Jamaica -- The gallows in Jamaica have been idle for more than a decade. But if the government here gets its way, convicted murderer Neville Lewis will soon be hanged, reflecting a new resolve toward using the death penalty that is sweeping the English-speaking Caribbean and stirring international debate between capital punishment advocates and abolitionists.

Although the 1992 slaying Lewis and an accomplice committed is one of the hundreds of killings that occur here each year, his case has become a rallying point for state executions at a time when public outrage over an epidemic of deadly crime, most of it related to drug trafficking and economic problems, has been rising.

Lewis, 29, has been on death row since October 1994, when he and the

other assailant were found guilty of killing a local businessman. The two were convicted of strangling the victim, robbing him and then dumping his body in a lake.

"In Jamaica, we have a serious situation in which people are recklessly killing other Jamaicans for no sensible reason, and it is getting worse, almost out of control," said Rolston Williams, an official at the Ministry of National Security and Justice who is involved in the Lewis case. "The great majority of people are firm that those who are proven to have committed these dastardly acts should suffer this, hanging."

Galvanized by the increasing popularity of hangings, a vestige of British colonial rule in the region, a number of governments in the Caribbean have undertaken controversial steps to change their justice systems and constitutions and sever ties with international appeals bodies to make it easier to carry out executions. Pro-

Kneecappings part of street justice delivered by IRA

By Marjorie Miller
Los Angeles Times

BELFAST, Northern Ireland - Andrew Kearney, known in his Roman Catholic neighborhood as a street fighter, was cradling his 2-week-old daughter on the sofa when eight masked men burst in after midnight.

Kearney was pulled out of his eighth-floor North Belfast apartment, forced face down in the elevator and shot three times, in the ankle and behind each knee, in what has become a trademark form of "punishment" by Irish Republican Army gun squads. His crime -- a bar brawl with an IRA man -- did not warrant capital punishment, but one of the bullets hit an artery and the 33-year-old Kearney bled to death before help arrived. "They left him to die in an old stinking lift," Kearney's mother, Maureen, said in grief.

Raised on 30 years of strife, many of Kearney's working-class neighbors describe the killing almost matter-of-factly as "a kneecapping gone wrong." Death by mistake, they say; if the IRA gunmen had meant to kill Kearney, they would have shot him in the head and saved two bullets.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary, Northern Ireland's predominantly Protestant police force, sees the July 19 shooting as murder, pure and simple. To call this a punishment, they say, is to legitimize another case of vigilante justice in which the IRA acts as jury, judge and executioner.

Either way, the killing illustrates one of the many complexities of turning Northern Ireland's Good Friday peace agreement into peace on the ground. In addition to halting car bombings and other acts of terrorism, Northern Ireland's political leaders must tackle a culture of violence born of 30 years of conflict and resolve questions such as how to administer everyday justice.

While Kearney's killing has been universally condemned, punishment beatings and kneecappings appear to have a large degree of community acceptance in the working-class communities that have borne the brunt of the Catholic vs. Protestant conflict over British rule. When residents are faced with "antisocial behavior," a term that covers a range of crimes from car theft to drug trafficking, they often turn to the IRA or, in Protestant neighborhoods, to the pro-British Ulster Defense Association and Ulster Volunteer Force. And the paramilitary groups readily comply.

Most people in Northern Ireland are fed up with political violence, as the universal public outcry against the recent Omagh bombing, which killed 28 and wounded more than 200, has shown. And yet, people still feel powerless and under siege, and crave immediate solutions where they can get them, community workers say. They

ponents of capital punishment contend that those condemned to death have been using these appeals mechanisms to stall their fates for years at a time.

This year, Trinidad and Tobago partially withdrew from the U.N. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and pulled out of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, both of which give those on death row an international avenue of appeal. Fourteen cases were before the commission when the country ceased its membership and one was being reviewed by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

The move by Trinidad and Tobago, which has won praise from the United States for its war against drugs, followed a decision by Jamaica earlier this year no longer to participate in the death penalty protocol of the U.N. accord. Several other countries have said they are considering similar moves.

These three Caribbean states, and Barbados, have also discussed eliminating dealings with the British Privy Council, the supreme court for many former colonies. Law enforcement officials in those countries are frustrated with a 1993 council ruling that deems it inhumane to execute prisoners who have been on death row

want instant justice, and paramilitary groups deliver more quickly than a bureaucratic legal system.

In the peace agreement reached in April, political parties representing Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups declared their opposition to the use of threat or physical force for any purpose. Political leaders had hoped that this -- and the accompanying cease-fires -- would bring a halt to beatings and kneecappings, but they have continued at least at the same rate as in previous years.

Kearney's death, two weeks after his final brawl in a bar, has become a flag in the hands of adversaries in Northern Ireland's sectarian politics. Outspoken critics of paramilitary justice, together with opponents of the peace agreement, say the killing is reason to keep the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, out of a new power-sharing government until the IRA hands over its weapons and renounces all violence.

"You can't have a political party in government with a private army," said Glyn Roberts of the British-funded Families Against Intimidation and Terror. "I don't think it's too much to ask the IRA to end all of the violence, full stop."

Sinn Fein says the killing illustrates a different problem -- the need for a nonpartisan police force in Northern Ireland. Until Catholics have a police force they can trust, Sinn Fein leaders say, average families will continue to seek out street justice against thugs and common criminals in the form of kneecappings and beatings.

"As far as we're concerned, this shouldn't be happening and it is an unacceptable form of discipline," said Sinn Fein spokesman Jim Gibney. "Whatever Kearney did, it didn't merit execution, and that's what happened." But he added: "Policing is a touchstone issue. The RUC will never be acceptable to the nationalist people because they are a sectarian police force. They don't live in our areas -- they occupy them. There is no alternative to a properly constituted police service."

Protestants generally are more inclined than Catholics to see the Royal Ulster Constabulary as theirs because it is 93 percent Protestant and has been a bulwark against IRA terrorism. But there also is distrust among their poor and working classes, who may see the police as protectors of the rich.

According to Kearney's family and news reports, his shooting was not a typical punishment attack. Although Kearney had had run-ins with both police and the IRA, he apparently was not accused of "antisocial behavior." Rather, they say, he had had a bar brawl with a known IRA man two weeks earlier and made the mistake of winning.

"I know why it was done: It was a personal grudge," his mother said

for five years or more. It commuted their sentences to life in prison.

Breaking away from the council would end a colonial link stretching back 165 years and, in the view of some Caribbean leaders, end a hiatus on hanging that stems from British pressure to abolish the death penalty in the region. The European Union, of which Britain is a member, considers state executions to be a violation of human rights. Capital punishment is not practiced in Britain's half-dozen dependent territories in the Caribbean.

In place of the council, Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and Barbados hope to establish a Caribbean Court of Justice next year. It would, among other things, hear appeals on capital punishment cases.

Human rights groups have expressed dismay over the push in the Caribbean for the death penalty, contending that experience in the United States shows it is not the solution to violent crime.

"I see a very disturbing trend led by Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago to more aggressively implement the death penalty for a greater number of crimes with fewer due process protections," said Sarah DeCosse, an expert on the Caribbean for the organization Human Rights Watch.

from a living room filled with flowers, photographs of her son and stacks of condolence cards.

Angry as she is, however, Maureen Kearney does not want opponents of the peace process, such as the hard-line Rev. Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party, to use her son's death for their cause. "I see them rubbing their hands nearly in glee," she said.

She does not want Sinn Fein to be excluded from the new government that will be selected from members of the Northern Ireland Assembly that was elected in June. "If they kick Sinn Fein out, we'll just go back to where we were (in the conflict)," she said.

Andrew Kearney grew up during the conflict but did not take part in it, preferring soccer to politics. He lived and died in the New Lodge area -- grim government projects that are home to about 9,000 Catholics, many of whom are third-generation unemployed. Their children have few diversions beyond a soccer ball, and fewer prospects for the future.

For decades, the IRA fought an urban war -- a campaign of terrorism, the pro-British unionists would say -- from areas such as these. The British army and Royal Ulster Constabulary were the enemy. Catholics are reluctant to call the police on a crime, either because they see them as British foot soldiers or because they fear reprisals from the IRA, which does not want the police force patrolling Catholic areas.

The RUC sees itself as a highly professional force that needs to recruit more Catholics but does not require the major overhaul demanded by Sinn Fein. They charge that the paramilitary groups warn people away from the RUC in order to keep control of the neighborhoods. "They want to create a degree of fear within their own community to maintain their own position in that area, to show who is boss," said Robert Maxwell, commander of the RUC's subdivision in North Belfast.

But some residents say the police scare people away themselves by trying to recruit informants against the IRA.

"You know, they'll say things like, 'Need help getting a mortgage? We can help you with that if you help us,'" said one resident of New Lodge. "Well, that doesn't exactly make you trust them."

Another excuse to avoid the police is the fear of retaliation from criminals who might be freed for lack of evidence under a legal justice system. Sometimes residents of these neighborhoods may turn for help to both the police and paramilitary groups, reporting a burglary to the RUC for insurance purposes and seeking "justice" from the IRA. As a result, a criminal occasionally may be "tried" twice, getting a sentence from the law

and a beating from the IRA.

But what appears to be the law of the jungle is actually a highly organized system, according to community workers, residents and police. The victim of a robbery or car theft takes his complaint to a local Sinn Fein office or directly to an IRA man. An "investigation" is conducted through family and IRA networks, and the suspect is confronted.

Young rowdies who cause trouble are given warnings, and their parents may be told to keep them in check. In the case of a stolen car radio or other theft, the suspect is pressed to give the goods back. Drug traffickers and other more serious criminals may be ordered into exile. Beatings and kneecappings are "a last resort," it is said. "Ninety-five percent of the cases are resolved without a beating," said a Catholic community worker who nonetheless decried the attacks.

Varying degrees of punishment are handed out. Beatings may be delivered with anything from a baseball bat to an ax handle studded with nails. A kneecapping may be a shot through the fleshy thigh, a clean hole through the kneecap -- easily repaired -- or a bullet spinning downward through the knee to splinter the shin.

A suspect may, in fact, be guilty of a crime, but the legal punishment would not be a broken leg. And in some cases, people apparently are executed intentionally, although there is no capital punishment in Britain, to which Northern Ireland belongs.

Sean McNally admits that he had been joy riding -- stealing cars to ride around town -- and filching car radios when gunmen nabbed him outside his house about 14 months ago.

"They came from behind and said, 'We want to have a word with you.' They took me behind the wall, put me down and took me leg off," McNally said.

His attackers used a shotgun, shattering his right knee and hitting an artery. A neighbor saved his life with a tourniquet, but McNally lost his leg.

McNally insists he received no warnings from the IRA before he was shot, although he says he probably would not have stopped what he was doing even if they had threatened him first. "They stopped me, because I can't drive no more," McNally said.

Community workers argue that punishment beatings are not only brutal, but they do not deter criminals. Many young toughs view the IRA as the establishment -- an authority to rebel against -- and have little fear. Some wear their punishment beatings like a badge of courage; they may even have been kneecapped more than once and continue to steal or deal drugs.

Still, many people in Catholic and Protestant communities continue to seek out this street justice.

Research shows rainforests resilient

The Washington Post

New research suggests that tropical rainforests are resilient and can recover from commercial logging.

Charles H. Cannon of Duke University in North Carolina and colleagues conducted an inventory of trees in a section of rainforest in Indonesian Borneo that had been logged eight years earlier for commercially valuable trees. Compared with rainforest areas that had been logged only a year ago, the study area did have fewer large trees. But the number of small trees was similar to that of unlogged areas.

"These results go against a lot of popular dogma," says Cannon. "The main point to take from this is that logged forests are not necessarily destroyed. ... The forests are more resilient than perhaps people have given them credit for."

The findings show that "in the

tropical forest of Borneo many tree species can recover from destructive

These results go against a lot of popular dogma

Charles Cannon
Duke University

commercial logging operations, and rare species that survive damage can benefit from removal of the dominant tree competitors," agrees Robin L. Chazdon of the University of Connecticut in Storrs in an editorial accompanying the study in the Aug. 28 issue of Science.

While conservation measures are still needed to protect tropical rainforests, Chazdon says, the "regenerative capacities of degraded, fragmented, or cleared tropical forests carry a hopeful message."