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Judge clears pilots in '03 crash

TORRANCE: Air traffic controllers are blamed for deadly helicopter collision.

By Denise Nix
Staff Writer

A deadly midair collision of two helicopters at Torrance Municipal Airport in 2003 was caused by error, negligence and carelessness by the air traffic controllers, a federal judge has found.

U.S. District Court Judge Florence-Marie Cooper's verdict, issued late Monday, contradicts an early National Transportation Safety Board

report that blamed pilot error for the crash that killed two people.

Jim Pocrass, who represents a pilot who survived the Nov. 6, 2003, collision, said there were different findings because the NTSB didn't have all the information the plaintiffs' lawyers had regarding the air traffic controllers' actions.

"When we got into the litigation and took depositions under oath and questioned them the way they should be questioned, it became absolutely clear that the air traffic controllers became confused and weren't doing the job the right way," Pocrass said.

Pocrass represents Gavin Heyworth, a 26-year-old former Marine

ON THE WEB

To watch an animated re-creation of the collision, and listen to audio recordings between the tower and aircraft, go to www.dailybreeze.com.

sniper who returned from Iraq about three months before the crash.

Heyworth, a student pilot, was flying alone in a Robinson R-44 helicopter around 3:30 p.m.

In a Robinson R-22 helicopter were Robert Bailey and 36-year-old Brett

HELICOPTER/A16



Torrance firefighters survey the runway at the airport after the Nov. 6, 2003, collision that killed two people in one helicopter and injured the pilot of the other craft.

File Photo

Obama stretches delegate advantage

CAMPAIGN: Supporters celebrate North Carolina victory; Clinton wins Indiana contest.

By Steven Thomma
McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Barack Obama moved inexorably closer to the Democratic presidential nomination Tuesday, holding on to his lead as time runs out on challenger Hillary Clinton.

His decisive win in North Carolina, even as he lost Indiana, denied her the two-state knockout punch that would have left him reeling.

Tuesday's votes were the last in states big enough to give one of the candidates a game-changing boost in delegates or popular vote. They now head to six final contests in such smaller venues as West Virginia, Kentucky, Oregon, Puerto Rico, Montana and South Dakota.

With only 217 delegates at stake in all six combined, Obama is all but certain to emerge after five months of voting with his lead among pledged delegates intact. In fact, Obama aides Tuesday night predicted he would win a majority of the pledged delegates this month.

He also added to his nationwide lead Tuesday in the popular vote — a second strong argument to take in June to the party elites who'll cast the deciding convention votes for a nominee.

Obama has one continuing weakness, how-

PRIMARY/A16

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Remembering the South Bay's *FALCON AND THE SNOWMAN*



A marshal escorts Christopher Boyce in 1981 after Boyce, the Falcon in "The Falcon and the Snowman" spy duo, was caught months after a prison break. Find out what and how he and fellow former Peninsula altar boy Andrew Daulton Lee plotted and what they're doing now. **KNOW PAGE D1.**

JetBlue's LAX flights on hold

TRAVEL: Four new daily trips to New York and Boston are cut as fuel costs continue to rise.

By Art Marroquin
Staff Writer

Record-high fuel costs have prompted JetBlue Airways to temporarily scrub plans to launch service out of Los Angeles International Airport, airline executives announced Tuesday.

The low-cost carrier was scheduled to offer three daily nonstop flights on May 21 from LAX to New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, and one daily nonstop flight from LAX to Logan International Airport in Boston.

"It's a difficult decision that's been in the works for some time, but we definitely remain committed to serving LAX," said Sebastian White, a JetBlue spokesman. "We just don't know when it will happen."

It costs more than \$15,000 — up from about \$9,600 last year — to fuel up each of the airline's Airbus A320 jetliners for a cross-country flight, according to White.

Ticket sales for JetBlue's LAX flights were suspended on Tuesday, but airline officials declined to say how many tickets were already sold. Travelers can request a refund or shift their flight plans to airports in Long Beach, Burbank and Ontario, White said.

"LAX was a costly venture because it's a new station offering transcontinental flights," White said. "That gets to be expensive when you combine that with soaring fuel prices."

Despite the postponement at LAX, JetBlue still plans to launch two new daily flights from Long Beach Airport to Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and three daily flights to San Jose International Airport on May 21, White

LAX/A16

NEW COSTS OF COINS

97.5 percent zinc
2.5 percent copper
1.26 cents to make

75 percent copper
25 percent nickel
7.7 cents to make

Change may be in store for pennies, nickels

By Laurie Kellman
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Further evidence that times are tough: It now costs more than a penny to make a penny. And the cost of a nickel is more than 7½ cents.

Surging prices for copper, zinc and nickel have some in Congress trying to bring back the steel-made pennies of World War II, and maybe using steel for nickels, as well.

"If we continue minting coins with the current metal content, with each new penny and nickel we issue, we will also be contributing to our national debt by almost as much as the coin is worth," said Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill., who chairs the House panel that oversees the U.S. Mint.

Copper and nickel prices have tripled since 2003 and the price of zinc has quadrupled, said Gutierrez.

COINS/A15

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