

Bank robber in shootout bled to death unnecessarily

By Steve Berry and Scott Glover=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Emil Matasareanu, one of two armed robbers who raided a North Hollywood bank and then engaged police in a chilling televised shootout last year, slowly and unnecessarily bled to death because some of the officers involved made a series of mistakes and some of the firefighters violated their department's guidelines for dealing with such situations, a Los Angeles Times investigation has found.

Perhaps the most critical of these mistakes occurred when a Los Angeles Police Department officer erroneously told city Fire Department rescuers that he thought Matasareanu was dead, and emergency medical technicians accepted that assessment without examining the suspect. Later, when the rescuers discovered that Matasareanu, in fact, was still alive, the Fire Department's dispatchers were not informed, according to one of the commanders on the scene.

As a result, Matasareanu, handcuffed and moaning in pain, lay bleeding in the street for nearly 30 minutes after firefighters at the scene realized he was alive, because dispatchers still assumed he was dead. By the time an ambulance sent to his aid arrived, it was too late. Matasareanu had succumbed to injuries that could have been treated with standard emergency care.

"You should see how sad it looks when someone is dying in the street and nobody cares," said Dora Rubensky, a resident who watched the aftermath of the shootout from her front yard.

Matasareanu and his accomplice, Larry Eugene Phillips Jr., who shot and killed himself, were "bad guys," she said, but "not animals."

But Matasareanu's preventable death did more than raise unsettling moral questions. It also denied investigators their chance to recover \$1.7 million taken in three other robberies in which Matasareanu and Phillips are thought to have been involved. Moreover, the dead man's children have sued the city, alleging that the police denied him medical attention.

City authorities' version of these events contrasts sharply with The Times' reconstruction of the incident, which was pieced together from hours of taped police and fire department radio transmissions, video footage and photographs, the previously unavailable report of an LAPD investigation and interviews with eyewitnesses.

For example, police and fire de-

partment officials have said that rescuers in the first ambulance to reach the scene opted to take a wounded citizen to the hospital because his injuries were severe but treatable, while Matasareanu appeared to have little chance of survival.

Authorities also said they could not send a second ambulance to pick up Matasareanu because the scene where he lay wounded was a so-called kill zone in which other suspects were believed to be at large.

The Times' findings contradict this official version on these key points:

—Rescuers were in little danger on the block where Matasareanu lay, because the area had been secured by a dozen or more armed police officers, according to witness accounts and Fire Department communication tapes.

—Matasareanu did not appear to be on the verge of death, according to witness accounts and statements from police officers at the scene. He was talking to police, moving his legs, lifting his head and moaning for help. At one point, a detective kicked him twice because he thought the wounded robber was trying to stand up and walk away.

—Rescuers, tapes of Fire Department radio messages show, were fully aware that the citizen they took to the hospital instead of the critically wounded Matasareanu had suffered only minor, not life-threatening, injuries.

—Police let a critical 20 minutes elapse after the first ambulance departed before calling to remind a dispatcher that the wounded robber still needed treatment, police communication tapes show. Though Matasareanu was just a few minutes from death at that point, the officer told the dispatcher to send an ambulance only "when there's one available," according to the LAPD communication tapes.

In the suit filed on behalf of the dead man's two young children, plaintiffs' lawyer Stephen Yagman alleges that LAPD officers "coldbloodedly murdered" Matasareanu by denying him medical attention. But though the action alleges misconduct by the officers at the scene, it is silent on the role of the fire-rescue personnel involved.

However, Don Vincent, the deputy city attorney defending Los Angeles in the action, said numerous officers called an ambulance to pick up Matasareanu, but that Fire Department officials canceled their requests.

Battalion Cmdr. R.C. Wilmot, who was in charge of fire-rescue op-

erations during the shootout, said in a recent interview that firefighters rely heavily on police to tell them when an area is safe enough for an ambulance.

Wilmot conceded that his department's rescuers — emergency medical technicians Allen R. Skier and Jesse Ortiz — should not have reported Matasareanu dead, as they did five minutes after arriving on the scene, without at least taking his pulse.

More troubling, Wilmot said, is that when the two rescuers discovered Matasareanu was still alive, they nonetheless left without calling another ambulance.

"I thought it was strange," he said. "But ... I wasn't there."

Wilmot said he requested a departmental investigation of the incident, but has not been informed of its results.

Fire Department Chief William Bamatre declined to comment for this story, citing the pending lawsuit against the city.

The two emergency medical technicians — acting on their supervisors' advice — also declined to comment.

Ten police officers and two civilians were hurt in the Feb. 28, 1997, shootout between police and Matasareanu and Phillips, who were armed with fully automatic AK-47 assault rifles.

Officers at the scene say they did not ignore Matasareanu's plight.

At least two police officers said in statements to LAPD investigators that they approached Ortiz or Skier and asked them to request another ambulance for the wounded suspect.

But neither Skier nor Ortiz mentioned any such request in their written statements about the incident. In fact, they said an officer initially steered them away from Matasareanu and directed them to a wounded citizen.

Later, when Skier attempted to approach Matasareanu, he reported, an officer turned him away. "Get the ... out of here. There are suspects in the area," said the officer, later identified by Skier as Detective James Vojtecky, the ranking officer at the scene.

Vojtecky, who has since retired and moved to Washington state, could not be reached for comment. But Vincent, the city attorney, said the detective told him "he could have (made the statement), but he didn't remember."

Wilmot said firefighters usually follow police orders at a crime scene.

S. Africa shaken by Black child's slaying

By Lynne Duke=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

ZESFONTEIN, South Africa — Nicholas Steyn was drunk that day, for that is how he usually was, his black workers said: a drunk and angry white man, though no one could say quite why. But it was best to give him a wide berth, they said, for he also flaunted guns. He'd shoot into the air in bursts of belligerence. People had been afraid of him for a long time.

So when Steyn angrily shouted at 11-year-old Francina Dlamini from the gate of his rural homestead one day, she did not stop. Toting her 6-month-old cousin Angelina in a traditional blanket pouch on her back, Francina was nearing the three-room hut where she lived with 10 relatives, who represented two generations of rural workers for the Steyn family. She was almost home.

But Steyn raised a handgun and fired. A bullet blazed along the tops of the tall dry grass, straight at Angelina's head. It smashed through the infant's skull and came to a stop in Francina's back.

Screams immediately arose from this obscure locale about 25 miles east of Johannesburg, and they have been joined, in the ensuing days, by the collective expressions of angst from a nation struck by the symbolism of the April 11 killing: how palpable the ugly past of apartheid remains for those who still live at society's margins, subject to the whims of their

rural employers.

Under white-minority rule, which ended in 1994, brutality against blacks was commonplace, especially against black tenant laborers in white-dominated rural areas. The apartheid system of racial separation left black farm workers at the mercy of white employers, locked into a situation of dependency often marked by brutality.

But even then, victims as young as these were the exception. The killing of Angelina and the critical wounding of Francina has dominated headlines and radio talk shows across a shocked nation. That such an incident could happen after four years of democracy and a sustained attempt by the new government to foster racial tolerance and reconciliation "has struck a chord because it appears stereotypical of the most brutal pre-1994 racism," the Business Day newspaper editorialized last week.

At the extremes of this anger are some blacks who want revenge and who know the racial injustices of rural life. There also is more measured grief and sympathy for the bereaved family, much of it cross-racial. And there are whites who have told reporters that Steyn, as a farmer in fear of the crime that has hit rural areas, was justified in what he did.

The killing comes against the backdrop of conservative white anger over crime in rural areas. Some say they believe that killings and burglaries on farms are part of an effort to

punish whites in general; others say the attacks are revenge against specific individuals for ill-treatment of black workers.

And so, instead of sympathy, some conservative whites voiced anger that President Nelson Mandela came here last week and expressed his condolences to Angelina's family when he has not done so, they said, for any white farmers slain in the past four years; in fact, he has done so.

But race is not the issue, Mandela responded, saying: "The killing of a six-month-old child, no matter what racial group he or she might belong to, is evil and barbaric."

It is not just the death that has shaken people, but what followed. Violet Dlamini, 29, Angelina's mother, was not told to which hospital her baby had been taken. When the children were rushed off by ambulance, "that was the last time I saw them," she said Sunday, her Zulu words translated to English, weeping as she reclined on a mattress with the baby's two grandmothers in a candlelit room.

Steyn, 42, was not arrested until the day after the shooting, and his house was not searched until a few days after that.

On Friday, Steyn opted to stay in jail rather than seek release on bail. As hundreds of angry black demonstrators converged on his bail hearing, he apparently decided it was safer where he was.

Steyn's lawyer could not be

Villagers wary of Diana museum's traffic

By Bill Glauber=(c) 1998, The Baltimore Sun

GREAT BRINGTON, England — They are waiting for the hordes of invading tourists. They are counting the days to the reappearance of flower mountains and camera-wielding news crews. They are dreading the arrival of two summer months crammed with grief and remembrance.

They are preparing for Diana — the memorial and the museum.

On July 1, 200 villagers of Great Brington will likely sit tight in their sandstone cottages and hope for the best as the outside world once again descends upon the ancestral home of Diana, princess of Wales.

Diana's brother, Charles, the 9th Earl Spencer, will be throwing open the wrought-iron gates of Althorp House, three-quarters of a mile down the road from the village. For two months, he will be "inviting" 152,000 people — at up to \$15.80 a ticket — to view from a distance Diana's final resting place on a tiny oval-shaped island set in a small lake, and to wander through a stable that is being converted into a museum devoted to Diana's life.

And to hear some of the villagers tell it, Charles Spencer's grand plan to honor his sister could turn their little corner of emerald England into a traffic-choked nightmare.

How on earth will the villagers get around, when the country lanes skirting the area will be clogged by up to 800 cars a day that will be directed to a makeshift parking lot in a pasture?

What is to become of their gorgeous church, where 19 generations of Spencers are memorialized?

And what about toilets for all those tourists who wander through the village that is part of the Spencer estate?

"We haven't got any loos," says Bill Bellamy, a white-haired 74-year-old who has lived in this village for more than 40 years. "We have a reading room. We have a pub. But we just haven't got the facilities."

For months, now, the villagers of Great Brington have been living under the cloud and memory of Princess

reached for comment, nor could his parents, who also lived on the farm. A news report said the parents have moved away for their safety.

Violet Dlamini is perhaps too grief-stricken to display anger. Indeed, she seemed numb during an interview on Sunday. As she described the day of the shooting, it was as if the events are burned into her brain.

They heard the shots. They heard the screams of 11-year-old Vusi, Angelina's brother, who had been walking with Francina. The family ran to the tall grass. Blood was everywhere. Francina moaned on the ground. They grabbed the children and rushed to the home of Steyn's parents. Steyn ran with them. He took the baby, placed her on the ground and attempted mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Then they piled into a Steyn family car and rushed to a nearby ambulance station, from which the children were whisked away.

Steyn was in tears the day after the shooting, she said. "I think there was some kind of regret."

As Dlamini spoke and dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief on Sunday, children's voices singing the national anthem, "God Bless Africa," could be heard outside the shack. A group of black students was approaching. With them was Mary Botes, a white woman who runs a boarding house in the nearby town of Springs, where the students live.

Respectfully, they filed into the small dark room of mourning and knelt on the thin straw mats. The students sang a bit more, and then Botes, brimming with emotion, burst out with a message she said she felt was all a white woman could say.

"We want to say from the bottom of our heart we are very sorry. The children are here to say they are very sorry. At least they know that not all whites are like that. ...

"I'm sorry for the white people of this country," she wept. "I don't know what more to say."

Diana, who was killed Aug. 31 in a Paris car crash.

Within hours of Diana's death, the world's media had staked out Great Brington, turning the sedate Main Street into a giant outdoor studio. In the media's wake arrived a grieving throng, plain people drawn from all parts of England and all corners of the globe. They shuffled by the thousands through the local church, to lay flowers and sign books of condolence.

"Every day, the people would come," says Christine Whiley, who runs the local post office and who became an unofficial village spokeswoman last summer when she gave hundreds of interviews to the world's media.

"There was a day, pouring rain, and people just stood there, quiet and dignified, waiting to sign the books," she says. "We had police. We had media. We had cars. The only time we had quiet was on the day of the funeral when the village was blocked off. Ah, that was bliss. At 8 a.m., it was just me and the birds at the church yard. Just beautiful. It sounded like a blanket of snow falling."

For a time, in those anxious days, it appeared that Diana would be laid to rest in the family crypt of the Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin. But Charles Spencer feared that the church would be overrun, so he had her buried on the island at the family estate.

The villagers say they realize that there will again be interest in Diana in the days leading to the first anniversary of her death. But they are adamant, they do not want the village turned into something like Elvis Presley's Graceland in Memphis, Tenn.

Basically, Bellamy says, the townsfolk want the cars routed as far away as possible from their slice of England heaven, but they say the least intrusive route was not chosen.

On a spring weekday, it's easy to see what Bellamy is talking about. Great Brington is compact and beautiful. The Main Street area consists of the post office run by Whiley and the 400-year-old pub called the Fox and Hounds Althorp Coaching Inn. The

pub must be the only one in England that has a sign on the front door: "No press or television crews, please."

The only Diana souvenirs to be found are at the post office, where there are a few books, some tasteful postcards, and first-day covers of Diana stamps with the Althorp postmark. Whiley had 10,000 of the first-day covers created, and fewer than 500 remain.

"People come and say, 'We just had to be here.' " Whiley says. "They'll take a taxi straight from the airport and come here in tears. I don't understand that. There's just something missing from their lives."

Bellamy says the town realizes the pressures faced by Diana's brother.

"We're not saying he is trying to make money out of this," he says. "We can understand he is besotted with his sister. That is human. We appreciate and endorse his objective. Where we're having disagreement is with the method."

Last week, Charles Spencer tried to calm fears over his project by giving a series of interviews with an area newspaper, the Northampton Chronicle.

He said that Diana's sons, Princes William and Harry, will be involved in planning what will go in the museum at Althorp. He stressed that he did not want his sister portrayed as a Marilyn-Monroe-style icon.

Spencer said he had borrowed "several millions" to build the museum and promised that proceeds from the project would go to the Diana Memorial Fund.

In the end, though, Great Brington will still end up on the tourist trail. And the villagers are hoping for the best.

"Hopefully, people will have courtesy and respect," says Linda Shaeffer, a New Jersey native who has lived for 10 years in the village with her husband, Gary.

"This will not be Graceland in the way Americans might know a site," she says.

"England does things with a little more propriety than that."

Lip-syncing robots spread the Hare Krishna word

By Kenneth J. Cooper=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

NEW DELHI — The familiar bands of religious disciples who shave their heads, don saffron robes and clink hand cymbals as they chant "Hare Krishna" have found a new, high-tech way of spreading their ancient gospel.

Robots. Here in the capital of the land where Hinduism was born 3,500 years ago, the New York-based sect has opened an elegant sandstone temple and museum complex that blends a bit of advanced technology and some Hollywood gimmickry with one of the world's oldest religions.

It is an unusual experiment in a developing country described by social commentators as continually confronting conflicts between the traditional and the modern.

No problem, say representatives of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, a Hindu sect founded by an Indian guru in 1966 and known colloquially to many Americans as the Hare Krishnas.

"Some people have the feeling that technology and religion go ill together," said Madana-Mohana Das, a Russian-born spokesman for the international sect. "I don't think so. They go well together. We use sophisticated technology to present the same ideas."

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who earlier this month dedicated the \$6 million center that rises up from a rock outcropping, praised what he called "an astonishing demonstration of the use of high-tech to popularize the higher truth of life and the universe."

In the complex's 150-seat theater, visitors will be able to watch human-

like robots dramatize a decisive episode from the Mahabharata, an ancient Hindu epic about an interecine war. The moviemaker Steven Spielberg used similar technical wizardry, provided by the same Los Angeles company, to animate his dinosaurs in "Jurassic Park."

The most advanced robots, which look like mannequins, represent the Hindu god Krishna, his warrior Arjuna and Swami Prabhupada, founder of the Hare Krishnas. These robots mimic human gestures, lip-syncing their lines in English, blinking their eyes, raising their eyebrows and tilting their heads.

On the main set, a saffron-robed Swami Prabhupada and four disciples sit in the lotus position in the foreground, with Krishna and Arjuna towering above them in a chariot in the background. The two ancient figures wear traditional warrior costumes, complete with gleaming, bejeweled breastplates.

During a short dialogue, music plays on a surround-sound system, and a video illustrates Krishna's transmutation from a human into a "universal form," displayed to demonstrate his godliness and buck up Arjuna's flagging spirits before a big battle against his relatives.

"Oh universal form, I see your body expanded everywhere without limit," a breathless Arjuna says. "The sun and moon are your eyes. I see you with blazing fire coming from your mouth, burning this universe by your radiance."

In his reply, Krishna orders his warrior: "Prepare to fight and win glory. Conquer your enemies and enjoy a flourishing kingdom. They are already put to death by my arrangement, and you are but an instrument in the fight."