

Posted on Thu, Aug. 18, 2005

Korean community looking for answers about Dublin shootings

By Sophia Kazmi
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Leaders of the Bay Area Korean community will meet today to discuss concerns over last week's police shooting in Dublin that took the lives of two Korean men.

Also today, Jee Kim, who lost her brother and her husband in the Aug. 11 incident, will hold a press conference to give her account of events.

Hun Kim, executive director of the Korean Community Center East Bay, said there are unanswered questions over the shooting of Kwang Tae-Lee, 61, and Dublin homeowner Richard Kim, 49.

"I think, given the story, there are questions that need to be raised to the Dublin police about investigating the officers' conduct, language sensitivity, cultural awareness and restraint in the use of deadly force," he said in a statement Thursday. "Beyond that, it is the opinion of the wife who witnessed the event that the police used excessive force and did not need to kill both men."

Police responded to reports of a woman screaming in a home on Innisbrook Lane about 11:40 p.m. When they arrived, they saw a man with a knife rushing up the stairs. Police entered the house and followed the man to the second floor and ordered him to drop the knife.

Jee Kim, told the Korea Times her brother, Tae-Lee was "very drunk" that night and couldn't hear the two police officers ordering him to drop the knife.

Investigators said Jee Kim told her brother -- who was visiting with his wife from Korea, and who did not speak English -- in Korean that police were on the way.

B .J. Han, the reporter covering the shooting for the Korea Times, said Jee Kim told him when Tae-Lee didn't drop the knife, officers fired once, injuring him. He turned and began moving toward the officers, who shot him four more times.

One bullet pierced a door of the bedroom where Richard Kim was. Police said it grazed his eye and his temple and went through his arm, severing an artery. He was taken to Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley, where he died Sunday night.

Jee Kim has retained attorney Jonathan Bae, who said his client will make a statement Friday

"I believe flat out there are many ways to disarm someone who is not firing a weapon at you," said Hun Kim.

David Kim, vice president of the Korean-American Association, said he hopes to meet Friday with Dublin Police Chief Gary Thuman. Also Friday, members of the coalition meeting on Friday will urge "a public and transparent investigation" of the shootings.

Thuman declined to comment on the investigation today.

The officers involved in the shootings, David Taylor, 39, and Tara Russell, 26 -- both five-year veterans of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office -- remain on leave.

Brian McKenna, a police lieutenant in suburban St. Louis, and an expert on officer safety techniques, said decisions on the use of deadly force have to be made in a split second.

"There are procedures in place to communicate with a person (like to call for an interpreter), but it's not something that can be done in a deadly force confrontation. Your average deadly force confrontation is 3 and a half seconds" and an officer coming cold to a scene is not going to know if a person speaks English, he said.

"If you see a man running up the stairs with a knife, your concern is what is he doing with that knife. . . You're standing there going 'What happens if this man gets out of my control and I can't stop him and somebody gets hurt?'"

Although Tae-Lee did not understand English, McKenna said the message of an officer with a gun should be clear.

"It's just common sense that you don't threaten a police officer with a gun pointed at you," he said.

There have been some concerns about why police did not report that the homeowner was also shot, until after he died on Sunday.

But, Tom Aveni, an expert on police use of force, said it's not uncommon for departments to wait until they have all the facts before releasing information about officer-involved shootings.

"The public perception is that police are trying to hide something," when that happens, even though that is not true, said Aveni, co-founder of the Police Policy Studies Council.

"I don't think anyone realizes what an officer goes through, even with shooting an armed suspect . . . And if it's an accidental shooting, it's a terrible thing," McKenna said.

"You have to be sensitive to that officer's needs and you want to make sure you're right before you say anything," he said.

Visitation services for Richard Kim and Tae-Lee will be 7:30 p.m. today at the Jess C. Spencer Mortuary in Castro Valley. The funeral will be 10 a.m. Saturday.

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