

Six believed killed prior to Harlem blaze



NEW YORK (AP) — Firefighters answering a call for a small fire made a gruesome discovery: six bodies lying in a blood-soaked apartment. Three were children, including an 18-month-old found in her crib.

Firefighters battling Monday morning's blaze at the Jefferson Housing project in Manhattan's East Harlem first thought the victims had succumbed to smoke. But as they carried the bodies out, a different picture emerged.

"There was blood everywhere," said Fire Lt. Ken Schermerhorn. But firefighters didn't immediately know that because smoke had filled the second-floor apartment.

It wasn't until someone broke a window and the smoke cleared that the crime became evident.

"I thought I had been walking in water," Schermerhorn said of the bloody floor. He called it the worst scene he'd ever encountered in his 20 years of firefighting.

Killed were identified Maria Rodriguez, 27; her three children: Bill Getz, 11; Jennifer Getz, 5; and 18-month-old Linda Javier; Rodriguez's mother, Bienvenida Rodriguez, in her 50s, and the elder Rodriguez's boyfriend, Rafino Lopez, also in his 50s.

The three adults and the 11-year-old were found on the bed in the master bedroom, the 5-year-old and 18-month-old were in separate bedrooms. "The little one was in her crib," Schermerhorn said.

The fires, in a couch and a bed, appeared to have been set to cover up the crime, said Sgt. Edelle James, a police spokeswoman.

Police said there were numerous cut and slash marks on some of the bodies and signs of strangulation on several victims. The medical examiner's office will try to determine the cause of death.

No weapon was recovered, but investigators theorized it may have been a cleaver or machete.

There was no sign of forced entry and the apartment hadn't been ransacked.

Maria Rodriguez and her children had just moved into the eight-building complex in January, said Housing Authority spokeswoman Amanita Duga-Carroll. Her mother recently joined her after being burned out of her apartment.

The family "had no reputation of involvement with drugs," Duga-Carroll said.

Serb peace deters U.S. military

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Serbs came up with the best defense against President Clinton's decision to apply military pressure to halt the fighting in Bosnia. They started talking peace.

"So long as there is an active possibility for peace, the case for military action is weakened," said Rep. Lee Hamilton, D-Ind., chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

The sudden shift in Serbian strategy pointed to how complicated a task it is to put together the domestic and international support needed for military action. At home, Clinton has yet to spell out for the American people why U.S. troops should be placed at risk in the Balkans. A CNN-USA Today poll in late April found 62 percent of Americans opposed to air strikes.

"He has to make out the case for it, and he hasn't done that yet," Hamilton said of the president.

And now an already skeptical American public hears that Serb leader Radovan Karadzic has signed a peace plan that provides for an end to the fighting in Bosnia and division of the former Yugoslav republic into 10 cantons.

Karadzic's timing appeared designed to undermine Secretary of State Warren Christopher's mission to win allied support for using military force, in all likelihood limited to air strikes.

Christopher's first stop was London and the reception from Prime Minister John Major and his government was distinctly cool.

Clinton and Christopher voiced skepticism about Karadzic's sudden support for a peaceful solution to the civil war.

"We are not going to be thrown off stride," said Christopher, pressing on with his search.

But, as Hamilton put it, the signing of a peace agreement "clearly complicates Christopher's mission."

Reflecting domestic skepticism, many members of Congress have urged the president to stay out of the Yugoslav conflict. But many who support his position say he hasn't gone far enough.

Clinton called Sen. Richard Lugar on Friday and a source familiar with the conversation said the Indiana Republican, an influential member of the Foreign Relations Committee, urged the president to stop saying he has ruled out using U.S. ground troops in Bosnia.

Lugar argued that Clinton shouldn't rule out any military option.

When Clinton answered reporters' questions Monday there was a slight shift in emphasis on the matter of ground troops.

The president said he was "not interested in sending our soldiers in there into combat, into a fighting situation." But he coupled that with a reminder that he has expressed willingness to join an international peacekeeping force.

Such a force would not go into Bosnia until all sides had agreed to stop fighting. In theory, a peacekeeping force operates in a non-combat situation. Its presence is enough to deter fighting between local combatants.

But in reality, an international peacekeeping force would have to enter Bosnia with an understanding of how aggressively it would keep the peace. Would it be limited to self-defense? Or would it have a mandate to engage and disarm troops who threaten to disrupt a cease-fire agreement?

The answers to those questions won't come easily within a NATO alliance already reluctant to become involved militarily in Bosnia.

That reluctance has made it difficult for Clinton to get the attention of combatants in Bosnia when he talked about the need to take stronger action.

"For a long period of time, the threat of military force has not been credible," said Hamilton.

Perhaps the past week has changed that. Clinton may finally have convinced the Serbs that he is prepared to commit U.S. air power and political influence to ending the fighting.

They also may have realized that by talking peace they encourage the obvious Western reluctance to intervene.

'So long as there is an active possibility for peace, the case for military action is weakened.'

— Rep. Lee Hamilton, Foreign Affairs Committee chairman

Charges of espionage filed against American employee

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI accused an American employee of the U.S. Embassy in Athens of spying Monday but did not disclose details of the charges.

The employee, Steven Lalas, 40, of Dover, N.H., was held without bail after a brief federal court hearing in Alexandria, Va. He was advised of his rights by U.S. Magistrate Barry Poretz, who will have another hearing Wednesday to determine whether there is probable cause

to continue to hold Lalas without bond.

The contents of an affidavit detailing the charges against him have not been made public.

The FBI arrested him Friday in northern Virginia just outside of Washington, D.C.

State Department officials who requested anonymity said Lalas, a communications officer, had top secret clearance with access to cables assessing U.S.

policy toward Greece.

The FBI is trying to determine whether Lalas began his espionage activity in Greece or had already started while in Turkey on a previous tour, said an official who spoke only on condition of anonymity.

Among the material he would have had access to at both postings is cable traffic relating to NATO, in which both Turkey and Greece are members, said the official. While both are U.S.

allies, Greece and Turkey are historic rivals.

New York Newsday reported that Lalas also had access to voluminous cable traffic concerning the situation in Bosnia and other parts of the former Yugoslavia.

The FBI refused to say whether Lalas is accused of passing secret information to the Greek government or Greek intelligence officials.

In Athens, Greek government spokesman Vassilis Magginas said, "The Greek government is totally unaware of the matter."

Lalas has worked for the State Department since 1983 and was stationed in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, and in Istanbul, Turkey, before he was assigned in December 1990 to the U.S. Embassy in Athens.

The State Department said Lalas has been suspended from his \$38,000-a-year job.

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Walsh still has questions for Bush

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran-Contra investigator Lawrence Walsh and attorneys for George Bush apparently have reached an impasse over fresh efforts to question the former president, according to *The Washington Post*.

The impasse could mean Walsh will close out his 6 1/2-year inquiry into the scandal without ever asking Bush about his withholding of a secret diary from investigators, the newspaper reported in Tuesday editions.

Iran-Contra investigators did question Bush about the controversy while he was still vice president. But since then the White House has disclosed that Bush kept a diary at the time the Iran-Contra events were unfolding.