

Officer charged with murder in New Year's Day shooting



By *Tristan Dewar*
STAFF WRITER

Oscar Grant, a 22-year-old grocery clerk from Hayward, Ca., was fatally shot in the early hours of New Year's Day at the Fruitvale Station stop of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system.

The case has received increasing media coverage in the wake of the shooting, although the matter has received inconsistent attention on a nation-wide scale.

The shooting happened after Grant was pulled off the train. Grant, along with a group of other young men, was detained after a fight occurred on board the train.

BART's operations control received word of the incident and dispatched five BART police officers to handle the situation at Fruitvale Station, where the train was ordered to hold.

Several video recordings taken of the account, recorded via cell phones by passengers on the train, indicate that the officers subdued Grant, who was lying facedown on the platform with his arms behind his back.

Without any apparent signs of struggle from Grant, former Officer Johannes Mehserle, aged 27 and a two-year veteran of the force, then drew his service weapon around 2:15 a.m. and fired a single shot into Grant's back. Grant died at Highland Hospital in Oakland several hours later.

Eyewitnesses say that Grant was handcuffed at one point, but that officers removed the cuffs before reporters arrived. All parties agree that Grant was unarmed. Police investigators say that Grant put up a brief struggle, but was entirely restrained at the time of the shooting.

"Officers close ranks to validate their own use of deadly force," said sophomore Sam Howard. "Knowing that fellow officers will defend your decision increases the chance that an officer will use deadly force, and it's often perceived that criminals are subhuman and not deserving of equal treatment anyway."

Mehserle resigned from the BART police force on Jan. 7, avoiding internal disciplinary action or a prompt to explain his actions.

Mehserle, without any resistance, was later

arrested Jan. 13 in Nevada at the home of a friend. Mehserle and his family left California to escape death threats leveled against him after the shooting.

Alameda County prosecutors charged Mehserle with murder, although it will be the decision of a jury to decide the degree of his crime.

Legal experts say this decision is unprecedented, as few to no officers in California have been charged for murder concerning on-duty incidents.

"In all cases, the defendant is innocent until proven guilty," said Christina Somerville, a

The shooting led to several protests and demonstrations intended to pressure the BART police department into responding to the incident promptly. One of the protests, held on Jan. 7, became violent.

"There is a long history of antagonism between police and people of color," said Maria Rosales, assistant professor of political science and native of Oakland.

The protest began peacefully around 3 p.m. at the Fruitvale Station. As evening fell, roughly 200 protesters broke off from the group and headed toward downtown Oakland, where rioting and destruction of property affected

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Maria Rosales, assistant professor of political science

sophomore and president of Blacks Unifying Society (BUS).

"We don't know what was going through (Mehserle's) mind. I hope no one quickly condemns either party," Somerville said. "Instead, people must examine all facts before them and then come to a fair conclusion in a respectful and peaceful manner."

Somerville's respect for due process does not overshadow her concern over the incident.

"For a lot of people, their privilege does not allow them to realize that these kinds of events happen all the time. Because Grant was a black male, people automatically have preconceived notions about him."

several businesses and other private properties.

Shortly after the rioting began, Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums addressed the crowd on 14th Street and encouraged everyone to remain patient while the BART internal investigation ran its course.

His appeal did little to stem the violence, as vandalism continued through most of the night.

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Recession leads to rise in enlistment in armed forces

By *Kylie Gilliams*
STAFF WRITER

Recent economic hard times have proved to be a boon for the U.S. military. With fewer jobs available, more and more people are joining.

"When times are bad I think the military is one job you can count on if you're a young person," said Robert Duncan, assistant professor of political science.

According to The New York Times, each of the active duty and reserve forces met or exceeded its yearly recruitment quota for the first time in four years. Much of the previous decline in enlistment was due to the rising casualty count in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"It's the gravel agitators that had trouble meeting their goals because they were shipping (people) off to Iraq and Afghanistan and putting them in harm's way," said Duncan. "No one wants to do that."

But with a rising unemployment rate and a plummeting stock market, people who may not have considered enlisting before are seeing the military as a viable option.

"I really had no intention to join if it weren't for the financial turmoil, because I was doing quite well," Guy Derenoncourt said to The New York Times.

Before his enlistment in the

Navy, Derenoncourt worked as an equity trader but was forced to quit when the economy took a turn for the worse.

A revamped G.I. Bill may also be a factor in the increased enlistment.



U.S. Army recruits wait their turn to go through the convoy live-fire course during Army basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., Sept. 19, 2006.

According to The New York Times, under the new bill the government will cover tuition at any public university or give significant aid towards tuition at any private university if a person spends at least three years on active duty.

"The incentives to sign up are very lucrative to someone that's not making very much money, or any at all if you're unemployed," said Cheryl Bridges, internship coordinator and vocational counselor.

Bridges added that a friend of hers in the Army receives varied benefits, such as help with credit card bills, free housing when she is on active duty, and low interest on her car loan.

There are long-term as well as short-term benefits to enlisting.

"(Recruits) are not only paid well but they get training, some of the best training in the world," said Duncan. "There's a number of jobs that the military does that you can capitalize on and translate into a great, well-paying job once you leave. It's a great launch pad for young people and their careers."

"If it hadn't been for the Air

Force I'd probably be changing tires or flipping burgers at this point. It taught me a skill that I parlayed into a very successful career with the CIA."

However, there are also drawbacks. Depending on the branch, recruits will likely have to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan. Those considering joining up must weigh the possibility of being injured or killed against the benefits of enlistment.

Despite the risks, recruitment is up and the trend looks to be continuing: the Army alone recruited 21,443 people in the past three months, which is over a quarter of their target quota for last year.

The military is not the only sector seeing growth: colleges and universities have also seen a rise in enrollment.

"It's a given that colleges and universities see an increase during a recession because people out of work want to figure out what's next," said Bridges. "If they can't have a job, the solution is to get more education so that when they do go back to work they can be more competitive."