

# CYA Officials Fear Youth's Killing Was Gang-Related

By SIGRID BATHEN  
Bee Staff Writer

Robert Ortiz was 17 years old when he was found late Dec. 26 lying face down in a pool of blood on the cement floor of his room at the California Youth Authority's Training School in Chino.

Police say he had been stabbed "29 or 30" times with a long blade from a pair of upholstery shears.

It was only the second reported

*At YTS alone, there are an estimated 81 street gangs.*

killing of a prisoner in the 35-year history of the Youth Authority, the first in the 17-year existence of the Youth Training School.

Police are investigating reports that the slaying was gang-related, that it might represent the fulfillment of a contract put out by the Mexican Mafia — a possibility which alarms Youth Authority and law-enforcement officials who have been hearing persistent rumors that adult prison gangs are seeking a foothold in the juvenile institutions.

"He made somebody mad," Chino police detective Donald Hartley said of Ortiz, "but we don't know why."

Hartley says he has been unable to substantiate reports of Mexican Mafia involvement in the killing. "We have at least a month of leg work ahead of us," he said. "Right now it's up in the air."

A week or so before Ortiz was killed, CYA officials heard rumors that he was having gang problems. They called him in to talk about it.

"He said he had some problems," Hartley said, "but that his family would take care of it . . . He didn't give much credence to the rumors."

Two suspects are in custody at YTS, and Hartley says each is affiliated with separate East Los Angeles Mexican-American street gangs. Although East L.A. is heavily dominated by the Mexican Mafia (or Eme) — a violent, prison-spawned gang believed by California law-enforcement authorities to be responsible for a spate of killings throughout the state — Hartley said there is no distinct tie between the suspects and the Eme. Ortiz was from San Bernardino and was affiliated with a Mexican-American street gang in that city.

Investigation of the Ortiz killing points up the increasingly complex problems faced by prison and police authorities whenever it is suspected that gang affiliations are involved in prison killings, as they often are. At YTS alone, Superintendent Keith Vermillion estimates there are 81 separate street gangs represented among the 800-plus inmates. No one knows for sure what influence, if any, is wielded by the larger, adult prison gangs.

"It is fair to say we are very concerned," CYA director Pearl West said of the Ortiz murder. "It certainly calls for the closest possible scrutiny."

Although authorities say there is considerable physical evidence in the Ortiz case, no charges have been filed pending analysis of the suspected weapon and blood-soaked clothing found at the institution. As is usually the case in prison killings — where a label as a "snitch" (one who talks to authorities) is tantamount to a death sentence — there are no eyewitnesses, at least none who will talk.

Chino police Sgt. Gary Knox said the killing appears to be "gang-related and contractual," possibly

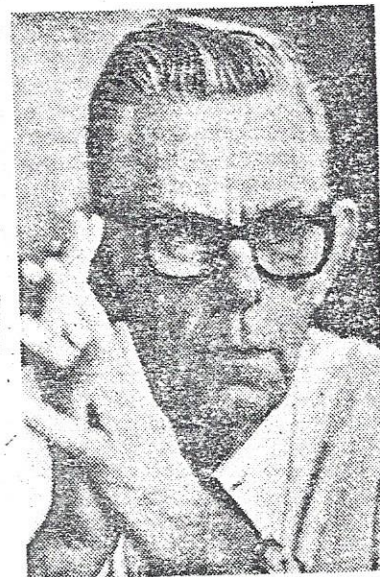
*Ortiz' nickname was the 'colonel of Verdugo Flats.'*

because Ortiz had done something regarded by other gang affiliates as "out of line."

"It's not uncommon for inter-organization activity when a member gets out of line," Knox said. "The evidence leads us to believe the killing may have been contractual . . . There is the possibility of a gang contract."

Hartley said Ortiz was a member of the Verdugo Flats gang, a San Bernardino street gang with roots in the barrio of the same name. He said Ortiz was nicknamed the "colonel of Verdugo Flats" and had the barrio's name tattooed on his body.

If the killing was gang-related, Hartley and Knox say it was probably over an internal problem and did not involve rivalry with another gang. In prison, authorities say, inmates with street gang affiliations often form other loyalties, merge with other



KEITH VERMILLION  
... appalled at attack

gangs, or are absorbed by larger prison gangs.

"If it turns out that it is, involved with the Mexican Mafia, it was something internal within the gang," Hartley said. "Maybe to teach him a lesson."

Although Youth Authority officials take a more cautious stance, some law-enforcement sources say Ortiz' death may foreshadow serious gang-related warfare in the juvenile institutions and on the streets.

Both the Riverside and San Bernardino Sheriff's Departments have assigned officers to work specifically on the problems of gangs in the San Bernardino-Riverside area, which

geographically includes YTS and the California Institution for Men, a state prison operated by the Department of Corrections and known to have Mexican Mafia affiliates among the inmate population.





PEARL WEST

... "we are very concerned."

Riverside County Sheriff's detective Mike Joyce said recruitment of younger members by the Eme has stepped up in recent months. "We don't have actual Mexican Mafia members at YTS," he said. "We have associates. To be a member you have to have been to state prison. They're trying to break away from that, however, and have started recruiting in the last couple of months (in the juvenile institutions) . . .

"The older gangs are trying to get the younger guys to do the dirty work. They're trying to recruit in the Youth Authority. It's picking up very rapidly. The gangs are really getting out of hand."

YTS Superintendent Vermillion and other longtime Youth Authority officials were appalled at the viciousness of the Ortiz murder. "In the past," Vermillion said, "when the kids talked about shanking (stabbing) somebody, they're talking about one time. Generally speaking, it almost seems by design that they're not going for a vital part."

According to the San Bernardino County coroner's office, two of the stab wounds went directly and deeply into Ortiz' heart, and he was apparently stabbed several times after he died.

"This was a violent death," said deputy coroner Ben Rubidoux. "It was probably not done by one person. Two people probably went in and one held him down. This was a strong, 17-year-old boy, and he would have put up a good battle, but the room wasn't disarranged."

Rubidoux said Ortiz' body was found under his cot, clad in a pair of denim cutoffs. There was dried and wet blood on and around the body; rigor mortis had already occurred.

In addition to stab wounds, there were a lot of tattoos on Ortiz' young body. Tattoos of Verdugo Flats, a sea serpent, a sad-faced cartoon character, birds and mountains, a sunburst, a spider, a rose, his mother's name — and a teardrop at the outer corner of his right eye.

The room was neat and "very organized," Rubidoux said. There were Rosary beads in the room, and religious pictures. When the deputy coroner arrived shortly before 1 a.m., the radio in Ortiz' room was still on.

"I kept wondering," he said, "why they left it on."

Ortiz was sent to YTS last July for armed robbery. Juvenile records are by law confidential, and authorities will say only that he had a juvenile record dating back to age 13 and had done previous Youth Authority time.

At YTS, Ortiz was assigned to a

### 'Older gangs try to get younger guys to do the dirty work.'

special medical-psychiatric unit designed for emotionally disturbed youths. Staff coverage on such programs is generally higher than on other housing units, and Vermillion said room checks were to be made every half hour when the youths were in their rooms.

"This was a specialized unit where we put — at the very least — highly emotionally disturbed people," Vermillion said. "The viciousness of this — I don't know what to attribute that to."

According to police and coroner's reports, Ortiz was last seen alive around 6:30 p.m. in a YTS recreation yard. Shortly after that, YTS officials say, youths in the program returned to their housing unit — Ortiz in the company of the two suspects in his killing.

Police place the time of death between 6:30 and 8 p.m. Around 9 p.m., there was a disturbance in the shower facilities of the unit — a disturbance which attracted the staff on the program and is generally regarded by authorities to have been a "diversionary tactic" to draw employees away from the scene of the murder, possibly to give suspects time to remove evidence.

Because Ortiz' body was not discovered until 11 p.m., officials are concerned that staff surveillance on the unit was lax. Disciplinary actions are reportedly being considered against some staff members. Officials say there was a clear "breach of security" on Ortiz' housing unit the night he was killed.

Because of its proximity to the Los Angeles area and other Southern California barrio and ghetto areas, YTS is known to have serious gang problems. It is the largest — and some say the most unwieldy — of the Youth Authority institutions, and it caters to older, more serious offenders.

More than 70 percent of the YTS population is black or Mexican-American, and Vermillion estimates more than 70 percent of these are affiliated with one street gang or another. He says most of the street gangs represented at YTS are Mexican-American.

Ironically, Vermillion says gang violence — measured in assaults by kids on other kids or on staff members — has been at a "low ebb" in the past year. According to CYA statistics, there were 72 assaults by YTS prisoners on other prisoners in the first 11 months of 1977, compared to 99 in 1976.

And, there were 36 prisoner on staff assaults in the first 11 months of 1977, compared to 76 in 1976. Most were without weapons; all were non-fatal. The prison population in both years was roughly similar.

CYA spokesman Art German said part of the drop, which is reflected system-wide, is a result of improved security measures and better staff "crisis training" to defuse trouble before it starts. At YTS, Vermillion attributes the drop to better programming and classification of inmates.

The only other recorded prisoner homicide in the Youth Authority was at Preston School of Industry near Ione on July 27, 1972, when 18-year-old Mark Foust was stabbed to death by another prisoner who was later

### Officials say there was a clear breach of security that night.

convicted of murder. There have been two killings of CYA employees, both teachers: James Wieden was bludgeoned to death at Preston during a 1965 escape attempt, and Marie C. Romero was beaten to death in her classroom at Paso de Robles School near San Luis Obispo 10 years later.



Whether or not the Ortiz killing is the signal for more violence in the CYA system is — among law-enforcement and juvenile authorities — a matter for considerable debate. But they generally agree that gang violence among young people is increasing at an alarming rate.

Youth Authority officials are cautious when talking about gang problems in their institutions, which currently house more than 4,000 prisoners. Officials are particularly cautious whenever the subject of possible adult prison gang infiltration into the CYA institutions comes up.

“At this point, it is purely speculative,” said CYA director West. “We have no proof that it exists. We recognize that some of our wards come from quite brutal environments when judged by middle-class standards. We’re trying not to label people by categories, unless there is substantial evidence.”

Superintendent Vermillion says rumors about adult gang infiltration at YTS have been “persistent,” but unproven. “We pray to God,” he said

of the Ortiz killing, “that this was an isolated incident.”

At the adult prison level, state corrections spokesman Phil Guthrie questioned law-enforcement

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*‘Like they say on TV,  
you ain’t seen  
nothin’ yet.’*

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speculation that the proximity of YTS to the Chino men’s prison (at one point, the two share a common geographic boundary, and some visitors see prisoners at both facilities) may account for possible adult gang infiltration.

He admitted some “spillover” occurs between juvenile and adult institutions — largely, he said, as a result of juvenile offenders later “graduating” to adult prisons.

“Gang members are said to have used young people for killings,” he said, “but that’s just scuttlebutt.”

Sam Bernardino Sheriff’s detective Jim Watkins, recently assigned to a

gang detail for that jurisdiction, says street gang members like Ortiz become “more sophisticated” when they go to prison.

“It’s already a problem in the state prisons. Now it’s filtering down . . . We’ve seen quite an increase. The L.A. area is so impacted that it (gang activity) is coming up here. It’s just a matter of time. We’re going to see a whole lot more of it unless they (authorities) can separate the gangs. It’s a big problem . . .”

“Like they say on TV, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet.”

# Youth Slain In Chino Institution

By SIGRID BATHEN  
Bee Staff Writer

A 19-year-old prisoner was killed Sunday at the California Youth Authority's Training School in Chino — the prison's second slaying in less than a month and only the second in the 17-year history of the institution.

Officials say Joseph Trujillo of Long Beach, who was serving a term for murder, was strangled with a coat hanger shortly before 5 p.m. by three other prisoners. A prison employee witnessed the killing but was unable to reach the victim in time.

Prison and police officials believe the killing was in retaliation for a Saturday gang killing in the Long Beach-Hawaiian Gardens area. The Dec. 26 stabbing death of 17-year-old Robert Ortiz of San Bernardino at the Chino youth prison was also believed to be gang-related, but involving different Mexican-American gangs.

Officials do not believe the Ortiz and Trujillo killings are related, but they are concerned about a rising tide of gang activity in the youth institutions and on the streets.

They say Trujillo, who had been at the training school since August 1976, was a member of the Longo Mexican-American street gang in Long Beach. The three suspects, who have been locked up at the nearby California Institution for Men, a state Department of Corrections prison in Chino, are believed to be members of a Hawaiian Gardens Mexican-American street gang — one of whose members may have been killed Saturday by a member or members of the Longo gang.

Asked why Trujillo was selected for the alleged retaliation, training school official Lloyd Wolfe said: "Apparently anybody who happens to be convenient will do," if he is a member of the rival gang as Trujillo was. "It reflects the attitude that gang loyalty is more important than anything else."

Wolfe said Trujillo was killed in a day room while other inmates were having dinner in the dining room. A prison employee inspecting the day room discovered the attack, Wolfe said, but was prevented from breaking it up when the suspects threw chairs at him.

Chino Police Sgt. Gary Knox said Trujillo died of the coat hanger strangulation, but also suffered superficial stab wounds and one deep puncture wound in his chest from being stabbed with "a sharp pointed instrument similar to an ice pick." Wolfe said he had also been beaten.

The killing is the third reported prisoner murder in the Youth Authority's 35-year history. Before Ortiz' death, officials said the only previous reported slaying was of a prisoner at Preston School of Industry near Ione in 1972. Two employees have been killed over the years, one in 1965 and another 10 years later.

The Ortiz and Trujillo deaths point up the growing gang problem in CYA institutions, particularly at the training school, where Superintendent Keith Vermillion estimates there are 81 separate street gangs represented among the 800-plus inmates. About two-thirds of the prison population is black and Mexican-American, many from nearby Southern California barrio and ghetto neighborhoods. Most of the 81 gangs, Vermillion adds, are Mexican-American.

CYA and law enforcement officials are also concerned that adult prison gangs may be infiltrating youth institutions. Although no charges have yet been brought in the Ortiz slaying, police are investigating reports that the killing was the result of a gang contract possibly put out by the Mexican Mafia, a violent state prison-spawned gang believed responsible for a series of California killings.

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# Gang Slayings

## Youth Authority Rethinks Outlook

*Editor's note: Two prisoners have been killed at the California Youth Authority's Training School in Chino in the past month. Authorities believe both killings were gang-related. Today, CYA Director Pearl West announced drastic administrative measures — including transfers of 20-25 inmates from CYA institutions to state prisons — to halt gang violence in youth prisons. The following account describes the relationship between street and prison gangs in the Youth Authority — and the steps being taken to stop their growing influence.*

By SIGRID BATHEN  
Bee Staff Writer

There was a party last Saturday night in a place called Hawaiian Gardens, an exotic name for a Southern California neighborhood known by prison gang experts as a spawning ground for Mexican-American youth gang activity.

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Sgt. Duane Rasure said several members of the Longos, a Mexican-American street gang based in nearby Long Beach, were at the party. Members of the Hawaiian Gardens gang may have taken exception to the Longos presence on "H.G." turf.

Rasure says a "horrendous" street battle between the two gangs ensued shortly after midnight, leaving unknown numbers injured and one 16-year-old H.G. member dying of multiple stab wounds.

The youth died in a hospital at 4 a.m. Sunday. Later that day, his older brother had a visitor, possibly a family member, at the California Youth Authority's Training School in Chino where he was a prisoner.

At 5 p.m. that night, Longos member Joseph Trujillo, 19, of Long Beach, was beaten, stabbed and strangled with a coat hanger in a "day room" at the youth prison. The three suspects — who did not include the dead 16-year-old's older brother — were all members of the Hawaiian Gardens gang.

Law enforcement and Youth Authority officials who have pieced together that account don't think it's mere coincidence.

Joseph Trujillo was serving time for helping to stomp a man to death in the restroom of a Los Angeles County park. At the time of the crime, he was on a family visit furlough from a previous sentence for strongarm robbery and assault.

He was not, officials say, a "heavy" in the Longos gang. He just happened to be available, it appears, for a revenge killing, according to officials.

Trujillo's killing was the second prisoner slaying in the 17-year history of the prison and the third in the 35-year existence of the Youth Authority.

On Dec. 26, 1977, Robert Ortiz, 17, of San Bernardino, died at YTS after being stabbed 30 times with a long blade from a pair of upholstery shears. The slaying was a gang contract, officials speculate — different gangs than those believed to be involved in the Trujillo killing, possibly a contract put out by the Mexican Mafia, one of several adult prison gangs that officials fear may be seeking a foothold in the juvenile institutions.

Officials say Ortiz' killing was a vicious attack — probably by two persons, both of them under investigation — in a private room at the prison. There were efforts to hide the alleged weapon, the bloody laundry and other evidence.

There was no such effort in the Trujillo killing, which occurred while other prisoners were having dinner and under circumstances when Trujillo's attackers probably could expect to get caught. The attack was witnessed during various stages by three CYA employees, who were prevented by the suspects from reaching the victim. One employee, a youth counselor first on the scene, was badly bruised when the suspects repeatedly threw chairs at him to keep him away.

What chills the CYA people most, Director Pearl West and others say, is

that the three apparently didn't care.

"As they were being taken away, they were gleeful, very boastful," recalls Mrs. West, who visited YTS the day after the attack.

After the killing, Mrs. West says she immediately ordered the three transferred to the California Institution for Men, a state Department of Corrections prison in Chino. The Chino Police Department reportedly expects to file charges against the three.

The CYA director has also ordered the transfers of more than 20 "hard-core" violent offenders out of the Youth Authority and into the Department of Corrections' Deuel Vocational Institution near Tracy. Her action —

expected to be carried out beginning Saturday — represents a major reversal of CYA policy that largely halted the incarceration of CYA prisoners at DVI in the early 1970s, in the belief that youthful offenders should not be sent to adult prisons.

YTS is the largest CYA facility and it also has the worst gang problems in the system — partly because of its proximity to Southern California barrio and ghetto street gangs and because a lot of older, tougher youths were sent there when CYA offenders stopped going to DVI.

At the peak of commitments of youths to DVI in the early and mid-1960s, Youth Authority spokesman Art German says 1,000 CYA prisoners were there. That number dwindled to a handful in the early 1970s, and officials say there were only eight CYA commitments at DVI when Joseph Trujillo was strangled last Sunday night.

In an announcement to CYA staff, Mrs. West said today that "15 or 20" youths at YTS will be sent to DVI, plus another "five to eight" from Preston. CYA estimates the total number sent to DVI in coming years will run between 100 and 200.

"We are screening the older, most violent and acting-out wards and sending the worst of them to DVI," Mrs. West said in her announcement. "The selection will be based on criteria which give strong consideration to the commission of ... repeated crimes against persons."

She said the transfers are designed to protect other prisoners as well as staff, "so that our programs can continue for the thousands of wards who are sincerely interested in making a transition to the community."

Mrs. West says CYA officials may also request court review of particularly violent cases for recommitment from CYA to the adult prison system. She said intake procedures in CYA institutions will also be tightened — with a view to the possible gang affiliations which new inmates bring from the streets.

The department has also quietly organized a three-member gang task force — the Law Enforcement Communications Team — to gather and exchange information about street gangs that spill over into institutions, and vice versa.

Headed by Jon Arca, a former Oakland police captain and Emeryville police chief, the team will work with local law enforcement and adult prison officials to keep abreast of gang affiliations and activities. If the con-



cept works, officials believe killings like Trujillo's could be prevented.

"If we had had some indications that there had been a killing as a result of a fight between two street-based gangs, we might have been able to stop it," said CYA chief deputy director Robert Mabbutt.

Mabbutt said officials will be designated in each institution to gauge gang activity, and Arca's team will meet regularly with law enforcement and prison officials in an attempt to defuse the CYA gang problems.

Although youth gang activity mostly originates in ghetto and barrio neighborhoods, officials are concerned that the four major adult prison gangs are recruiting members or associates in the juvenile institutions and on the streets.

At YTS, Superintendent Keith Vermillion estimates there are 81 street gangs, mostly Mexican-American, represented among the 800-plus prisoners. The YTS population is estimated to be more than 70 percent black and Mexican-American, with many prisoners coming from poor

southern California barrio and ghetto neighborhoods.

The four major adult gangs — the Mexican Mafia, the Nuestra Familia, the Black Guerrilla Family and the Aryan Brotherhood — are said to have originated in state prison along obvious racial and ethnic lines. For the two Mexican-American gangs, authorities say, there is a "blood in, blood out" rule — namely, that one kills to gain membership and will be killed if he tries to leave.

"We don't have the problem that the Department of Corrections does," says Mabbutt, "but we do have (adult gang) sympathizers, possibly some members. And the street gangs are ripe for recruitment..."



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PEARL WEST  
... acts after killings