



## With gorilla on run, zoo, police clashed

### Staff tells of communication breakdown despite joint training drills

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By TERRI LANGFORD / The Dallas Morning News

Despite more than five years of emergency drills together, the Dallas Zoo staff and Dallas police struggled with one another the day Jabari the gorilla escaped, according to zoo records obtained by *The Dallas Morning News*.

Statements written by zoo employees immediately after the March 18 incident paint a picture of chaos instead of a well-trained team working together to find and subdue the 350-pound western lowland gorilla and rescue the three people injured by the primate. The gorilla was eventually shot to death by police.

For nearly 50 minutes, as the zoo's staff tried to evacuate patrons into locked buildings, move the injured to safety and track Jabari, they found themselves overrun by officers who ignored or were unaware of established emergency protocol the Police Department personnel helped to write.

"It was mayhem," wrote Mike Glover, the zoo's emergency weapons team leader. "Nonzoo personnel were all over the site and approaching any zoo staffer they could find with questions and instructions. They were prepared to move in and frustrated that we were holding them up."

Dallas Interim Police Chief Randy Hampton could not be reached for comment Tuesday on issues raised in the statements.

Rich Buickerood, the zoo's director, had nothing but praise for the officers who responded to the incident, but he did note that improvements will be discussed.

"We had a million plans that we wrote and exercised until we tested them under fire," Mr. Buickerood said. "In this case, we know there are some things we want to talk to the police about."

According to a statement by William Tinkle, a senior animal keeper with the zoo, the SWAT team ran past employees on the nature trail, bypassing a meeting point set up to organize a search-and-rescue mission.

"One other officer told us there was a 2-year-old and 8-year-old still unaccounted for, but I told the officer that the kids were .... [at] Station One secured," Mr. Tinkle said.

Other zoo staff members described how police officers contradicted their own protocol and instructions to visitors that day, causing even more confusion.

"Several officers were asking that the monorail go to the station and unload [without] knowing exactly where Jabari was," Mr. Tinkle wrote.

In another instance, officers led visitors out of buildings after zoo staff members had told the same zoo patrons to remain in the locked buildings.

Mr. Buickerood defended the police shooting of the gorilla.

"We need to be fair to those guys," he said. "The guys who were the shooters were part of the training. They know our procedures. ... I'll go to my grave believing they had no choice."

It is still not known exactly how many officers responded to the incident, despite several requests for the number from the Dallas Police Department.

The last time police and the zoo staff conducted a training drill was September.

Confusion reported

The scene that emerged from the statements showed two agencies following different paths:

Officers who had never been involved in any of the emergency drills ran past the zoo's emergency response team with pistols drawn despite warnings from zoo staff members that handguns against a gorilla were useless.

Dallas police urged zoo weapons experts to shoot the gorilla as they were trying to quietly approach the animal.

As the senior zoo veterinarian tried to deal with a malfunctioning tranquilizer gun and reload a second one, he had to stop to answer questions from a series of officers who rushed to the scene.

According to Mr. Buickerood, some of the confusion resulted from the fact that a general 911 call went out to emergency operators before the zoo could sound its "code red alert," an internal alarm used for animal escapes.

As a result, zoo staff members clashed with early waves of police patrol officers responding to the emergency.

"We had a very hard time getting cooperation from these officers as they would constantly wander away and start up the trail," wrote Michelle Jordan, a zoo mammal keeper.

The statements also describe how emergency response could be improved and how the zoo may have to redefine its role in an emergency.

For example, one gun and one tranquilizer gun jammed. There were not enough radios, leaving some staffers out of the loop about what was taking place.



Jim Mahoney / DMN

Almost two weeks after Jabari escaped and was shot, flowers and gorilla dolls remain near his exhibit at the Dallas Zoo.

The senior veterinarian had to load the tranquilizer gun by himself because there were no other members of the veterinarian staff working at that time.

Another statement showed that one zoo staff member hesitated when giving information to paramedics.

"They then asked me if I thought [the injuries were] ... bad enough to take Jabari down immediately," wrote Bonnie Hendrickson, an animal keeper. "I stalled. I said that I wasn't sure, but I didn't think so."

Ms. Hendrickson also wrote that it was good that Jabari wasn't "in front of the chimps who were in the exhibit and were already very upset. I don't know how they would have reacted to the shooting."

But it was Mr. Glover, the zoo's emergency weapons team leader, whose statement painted the clearest picture of how police and zoo goals may not mix when it comes to a dangerous animal escape.

Within minutes of the "code red" being sounded, Mr. Glover, who was carrying a 12-gauge shotgun and Alex Vasquez, who was armed with a .375-caliber rifle, made their way to the chimpanzee exhibit.

There, they watched Jabari. But every step of the way, police appeared to be distracting them, according to Mr. Glover.

"The police did not seem to recognize that they needed to remain behind us and we had to instruct them that their handguns would not be effective and they needed to stay out of our field of fire," Mr. Glover wrote.

'Lots of whispers'

"At no time did [Jabari] ... face us directly," Mr. Glover's statement continues. "There were a lot of whispers from the police, such as 'Shoot him,' 'What are you waiting for?' and 'You've got to take him right now.'

"I repeated over my shoulder in a whispered tone, 'If you guys don't be quiet and stay down, he is going to come over this gate at us.' They complied."

Mr. Glover said that one of the early police responders "became almost mutinous and pressed me for an explanation as to why we had not shot. Alex responded to this guy that we had no intention of firing unless a direct threat arose or we were ordered to do so by the ... [emergency response team] leader."

According to statements, there were problems with the zoo's response as well. Dr. Thomas Alvarado, who had the tranquilizer gun, was unable to find the zoo's weapons team.

Zoo spokeswoman Ellen Villeneuve said that one of the tranquilizer guns had jammed. Dr. Alvarado was loading a second when police shot the gorilla with .458-caliber rifles.

It is not clear from the statements why Dr. Alvarado wasn't with the rest of the party.

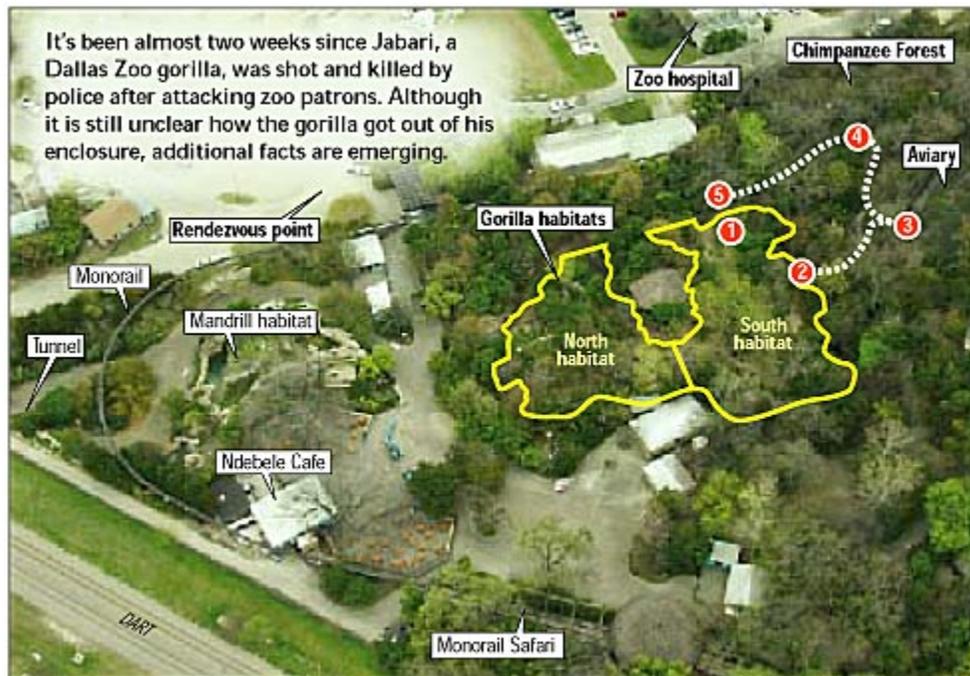
Several calls to Dr. Alvarado were not returned.

Mr. Buickerood, the zoo's director, said Tuesday that in the next month, staffers should have a better idea of how to safeguard the gorilla exhibit and whether their procedures for animal escapes should be revised.

"I think our staff performed extraordinarily well," Mr. Buickerood said. "I have no second guess about that. They performed exactly how we trained."

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## JABARI'S FINAL MINUTES



BRAD LOPER/Staff Photographer

**1. Zoo patrons are spotted antagonizing Jabari:** Witnesses later reported seeing two teenage boys throwing ice or stones into the exhibit.

**2. Jabari breaches his enclosure:** Officials could find no evidence of his escape and attribute it to a giant leap over the wall.

**3. Jabari enters the aviary:** The gorilla long had a fascination with the nearby birds. Once inside, he attacks three patrons.

**4. Jabari scares the chimpanzees:** Jabari is calm while watching them; they react with panic. The gorilla tests a nearby gate lock and moves on.

**5. Jabari is shot:** Two SWAT team members encounter the gorilla as he retraces his steps along the nature trail. He charges, and they fire.