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U.S. Casualty Reports Emerge in Mumbai

Nov. 28, 2008

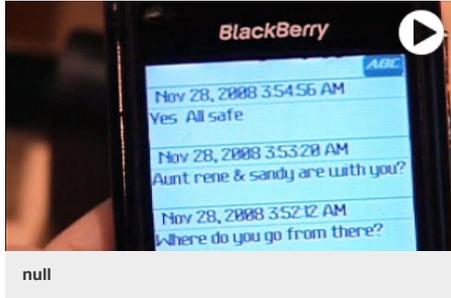
By EMILY FRIEDMAN via **WORLD NEWS**

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At least five Americans -- including a father, his 13-year-old daughter, and a New York rabbi and his wife -- were killed in the chaos of **ongoing terrorist attacks in Mumbai**, and at least three other U.S. citizens were injured, ABC News has learned.

At least 150 people have been killed since Islamic militants first attacked 10 sites across Mumbai Wednesday. More than 48 hours after the crisis began, Indian forces remain in a standoff with terrorists outside the historic Taj Mahal hotel.

Indian commandos staged a pair of daring raids Friday, storming an ultra-Orthodox Jewish center to take back hostages from the militants. After police wiped out the terrorists, and the unit pulled back and returned to the barracks, they were applauded in the streets.



Inside the center, bodies of the dead were found. Gavriel Holtzberg, a 29-year-old rabbi from Brooklyn, N.Y., and his wife, Rivka, were killed at the Chabad House, an outreach center for the Lubavitch Jewish sect, the religious group confirmed. Rivka Holtzberg was born in Israel and it wasn't clear whether she also had U.S. citizenship.

Also among the dead was Rabbi Leibish Teitlebaum, a kosher food supervisor who had moved to Jerusalem from Brooklyn, N.Y. several years ago and Bentzion Chroman, an Israeli with

dual U.S. citizenship, the Associated Press reports.

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, the chairman of the education and social service branch of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, called the attacks "senseless" and "barbaric."

"In 2003 shortly after their marriage, the young couple cheerfully gave up the comforts of home and took up residence on the other end of the world to help others in need," said Krinsky, breaking into tears.

"Words are inadequate to express our outrage and deep pain that the tragic act of cold-blooded murder has fueled," he said.

Krinsky said that the couple's young son, Moshe, will celebrate his second birthday day Saturday.

Sandra Samuel, 44, a cook who worked in Chabad House, escaped and pulled the Moshe out of the building. The boy was unharmed but his clothes were soaked with blood, news services reported.

"Today, he became an orphan," said Krinsky. "Emissaries will adopt this beautiful young toddler and ensure him the best possible upbringing into adulthood."

Holtzberg was described by other members of the organization as being "overwhelmed with joy and determination" during his time in India. One man said that it was unusual to see him without a smile.

The bodies of Alan Scherr, 58, and his daughter, Naomi, 13, both members of the Synchronicity Foundation, have been identified, according to Bobbie Garvey, the group's vice president.

"Sadness, loss, grief," said Garvey. "Alan and Naomi were extreme valued members of the community."

Aaron Butler, Naomi's brother and Scherr's stepson, wrote in an e-mail to ABCNews.com that the trip to Mumbai was his sister's first time out of the country.

"We are in an extreme state of shock and grief," wrote Butler.

Butler clarified that Scherr and Naomi were not in Mumbai as part of a religious group but instead

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were there on a meditational retreat and as "an opportunity for Naomi to see another country, since she had never traveled abroad."

Scherr and Naomi were traveling in a group of 25 people from the Synchronicity Foundation. A spokesperson for the organization said that of those traveling in Mumbai, four were injured but recovering and the remaining 19 were safe.

The group, which is based near Nellysford, Va., was founded by Charles Cannon in 1983 to advocate meditation principles and was holding seminars in Mumbai.

In a statement on the organization's Web site, Scherr is described as a community member who committed most of his adult life "to meditation, spirituality and conscious living."

"[Scherr] was a passionate Vedic astrologer and meditation teacher who inspired many people to begin a journey of self-awareness and meditation," according to the statement. "He was committed to making a positive difference in the world and devoted himself to the community he lived in."

Naomi was described as a "bright and lively young woman who loved spending time with people and living life to the fullest.

"She was passionate, if not a little mischievous, and will be fondly remembered by many of us for colorful hair styles and radiant energy."

American Couple Texts Sons in U.S. to Say They're Safe

A Lake Forest, Ill., couple was trapped in their room in the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai and used their cell phones to text their sons in the U.S. about their condition.

"My mom texted me at 12:15 a.m. [Friday] saying the assault is starting and they were hunkered down under the bed," said Jonathan Mackoff, the son of Richard and Carol Mackoff.

Myron Mackoff, the couple's other son, said that, had text messaging not been available, the situation would have been even worse.

"The instant communication makes things a lot easier for the rest of us," said Mackoff. "They still have to go through what they are going through, but we had constant information about what they are doing and they could talk to us, too, which I think made things easier for them."

"I told them on the phone, 'Next year it's Disneyland, and you're not going out of the country for a little while,'" he said.

Nancy Walsh of California was trapped inside the five-star Oberoi Hotel for 36 hours and emerged resilient.

"I've been eating snacks out of the mini bar," she said. "We felt pretty secure. I live in Los Angeles, for God's sake."

U.S. Casualties Expected to Rise

Other Americans were wounded in the bloody.

Andi Varagona and Linda Ragsdale, both of Nashville, Tenn., were in the Oberoi Hotel ballroom at about 11 p.m. local time Wednesday with a group of Americans, Australians and South Americans when gunmen burst in and opened fire. **Varagona was injured in the attack and is hospitalized.**

Ragsdale was shot in the back.

Varagona's personal Web site references the teaching of the Synchronicity Foundation. Varagona's husband, Santos Lopez, was at a family member's home in the United States working on his Thanksgiving Day turkey when he got a call from his wife in India.

"[My wife told me] one of the members of the party thought he heard gunfire and he stood up to see what was happening. Immediately this person tells the others: 'Somebody's coming and firing a gun.' They all stood up and began to run," Lopez told ABC News.

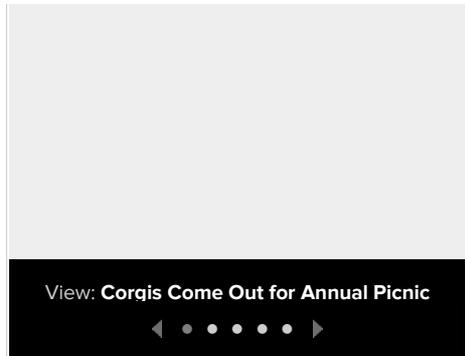
"They started running toward a man who was standing next to my wife, a friend of hers," Lopez said Thursday.

"She believes he was shot in the head." That man was apparently Allen Scherr.

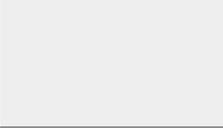
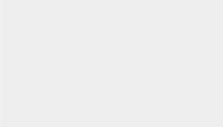
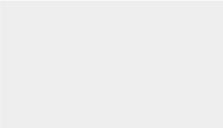
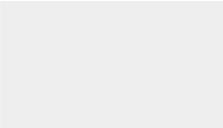
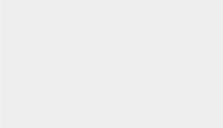
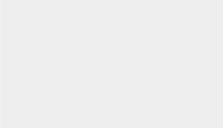
Lopez said that his wife described being covered in the man's blood.

"[She said] I've been shot and I'm covered in blood from somebody else," said Lopez.

He said Varagona suffered a shrapnel wound to her neck – presumably from a grenade – and also suffered bullet wounds to her arm and leg.



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Because doctors had to cut off her clothes to operate, Lopez said his wife was left without anything to wear, so he was looking for clothing as he got ready to board a flight to India.

"I'm going to be at the airport in Newark, N.J., trying to find some 'Welcome to Newark' T-shirts or sweatpants or something for her," he said.

Lopez described his wife as a marathon runner who had been meditating for 22 years, a pastime that kept her nerves in check during stressful situations.

"She's Italian so she's very, very passionate, but by the same token she's a very calm person," said Lopez. "She was more terrified about the person that was killed next to her."

Lopez was able to speak to his wife before she went into surgery at a Mumbai hospital.

"You always have in the back of your mind what if, what I what if," said Lopez. "But I really never expected something like this to happen to her."

"The next thing I know I was on my knees and felt like all my blood turned to ice and I was-- my world was crashing around me."

Varagona, who runs a holistic health clinic in Nashville and also uses the Hindu name Rudrani Devi, and her friend had been traveling in Mumbai on a combination business trip and pilgrimage.

ABC News' Kirit Radia and The Associated Press contributed to this report

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