



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times

INVESTIGATORS on Wednesday were trying to identify the human remains found in the charred cabin where fugitive ex-LAPD officer Christopher Dorner was believed to have died after a standoff with police.

Dorner hid in plain sight

Fugitive stayed in a cabin near police command center

By PHIL WILLON, ADOLFO FLORES AND CHRISTOPHER GOFFARD

To track Christopher Dorner, police from dozens of agencies chased tips across multiple states and into Mexico. But it appears now that he found a hiding place where searchers were

thickest.

It is unclear how long Dorner, 33, was hunkered down in the cabin in the 1200 block of Club View Drive, in the snowy mountains near Big Bear. But the cabin was so close to the manhunt command post and to an adjacent press area that countless police and reporters would have fallen in his line

of vision.

Questions abounded Wednesday about how Dorner managed to evade capture at the very center of the manhunt, a day after he apparently died in another cabin nearby during a police siege.

Authorities are trying to confirm whether charred remains found in the cabin,

which caught fire after police lobbed incendiary tear gas inside, belonged to Dorner.

Authorities declared the manhunt over Wednesday. And the Los Angeles Police Department, which had been on frequent tactical alerts, has resumed normal operations. Most of the protective details have been called off the 50 or so families who were threatened in an online manifesto police say Dorner wrote.

Dorner, an ex-LAPD officer embittered by his firing, killed the daughter of a retired LAPD captain, her fiancé and two law officers during a nine-day rampage that began in Irvine, police say.

On Feb. 7, authorities found the smoking wreckage of Dorner's Nissan Titan in the Big Bear area, triggering a massive search. Could Dorner, who reportedly bragged about his military and survivalist skills, survive on the cold mountain? Could he have staged the burning truck as a diversion. [See Dorner, A14]

'Blind leading blind' at county child services

A scathing report faults the agency in more than a dozen deaths. New director has begun changes.

By JASON SONG AND GARRETT THEROLF

A stifling bureaucracy and inept workforce have crippled Los Angeles County's child protective agency, resulting in a system that allowed children to remain in unsafe homes, sometimes to die at the hands of their caretakers, according to a confidential county report.

The investigation, conducted by an independent counsel for the Board of Supervisors, looked at 15 recent child deaths and a torture case. In all but two instances, investigators found that casework errors began with the agency's first contact with the children and contributed to their deaths.

The report is the harshest assessment of the Department of Children and Family Services in recent memory, echoing complaints from child advocates that the county has rejected for years.

Investigators largely blamed the department's problems on its decision to place its least experienced social workers in its most crucial job: assessing dangers to children. Many of those workers — facing a total of 160,000 child abuse hot line calls each year — are "just 'doing their time,'" according to the report.

Supervisors are poorly qualified and often disregard policy, creating a situation akin to "the blind leading the blind," with workers rarely held accountable for "egregious" errors, the report said.

The result has been deaths that might have been prevented had social workers taken basic steps to assess the risks.

Two-year-old Abigail, for example, was returned to her parents after social workers failed to look into their extensive abuse history and question their

weekend stays in jail for prior offenses.

A month later, Abigail was found dead, covered in bruises that the parents allegedly attempted to conceal with blue paint.

Viola Vancief, 2, allegedly was killed by her foster mother, Kiana Barker. Before Viola's death, the county's child abuse hot line received seven complaints about Barker. Each time, the investigating social worker [See Children, A18]

Priests' names added to abuse list

By HARRIET RYAN

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has quietly added two dozen priests and brothers to its list of clergy accused of child molestation.

Though the church deems the allegations against the men credible, the archdiocese has declined to release information about the complaints, including the number of accusers, the dates of the alleged abuse and the parishes where the men worked.

The names were disclosed in a two-page report posted on the archdiocese's website last month alongside 12,000 pages of internal records related to its handling of abuse claims.

The document was discovered recently by BishopAccountability.org, a nonprofit that researches and archives records of the Catholic abuse scandal.

The group's president, who stumbled upon the document during a recent Google search, criticized the inconspicuous way the men were named and the lack of information provided about their cases.

"The terrible mess in the [See Abuse, A12]



DEANNE FITZMAURICE For The Times

HOWARD EPSTEIN, vice chairman of communications for the San Francisco Republican Party, gets ready for the Pledge of Allegiance at a GOP meeting.

COLUMN ONE

Small fish in an ultra-liberal pond

Howard Epstein is a rarity: a longtime Republican activist in a city where a Republican mayor in nearly half a century, where a GOP endorsement is an epithet and party registration is vanishingly small, trailing far behind the ranks of Democrats and people who prefer no party at all.

By MARK Z. BARABAK REPORTING FROM SAN FRANCISCO

Think you've got it rough? Meet Howard Epstein.

He's a longtime Republican activist in a city that hasn't had a Republican mayor in nearly half a century, where a GOP endorsement is an epithet and party registration is vanishingly small, trailing far behind the ranks of Democrats and people who prefer no party at all.

No matter. Epstein smiles. He shrugs.

"I'm used to it," he says, after a bite of corned beef sandwich at a saloon in the city's Financial District. Not just to losing, but to being pulverized, election after election after election.

"If I moved into town from somewhere else that had a majority, maybe I'd say different," Epstein, 65 and the rare San Francisco native, adds. "I'm pretty practical."

At a time when the battered Republican Party is looking ahead to a worrisome future, GOP leaders could do worse than to listen to someone who knows adversity the way, say, Sisyphus knew frustration. Surely someone doomed to spend eternity rolling a boulder uphill, only to watch it tumble back down, understands a few things about physics.

"Listen to some of these guys; they sound almost mean," Epstein says of the party's leading voices. "We need to get away from that. There are some people, 'if you're not with us on every conservative thing, on every social issue, every political issue, we don't want you around.' We've got to get away from that, too, or weed some of those people out."

He continues: Lay off the social issues — "two guys get married, two gals get married, I'm not going to [See Epstein, A10]

Sunnis' anger is growing in Iraq

The minority has been staging protests with a quixotic goal: Ending sectarianism in the government.

By NED PARKER

RAMADI, Iraq — The call to prayer echoes across the quiet highway in western Iraq and a few hundred men gather along the roadside in the frigid night air. Each has a story to tell: a father whose son languishes in jail without trial; a veteran who cannot get a job; a student so terrified of the police that he avoids Baghdad.

In the morning, they know the area will fill with thousands of people like them, with stories like their own. Under the flutter of tribal flags, they will shout boisterously the same words heard from protesters across the Arab world: Down with the regime.

Something has broken. Much of Iraq's minority Sunni Muslim population appears to have run out of patience with Prime Minister Nouri Maliki, a religious Shiite Muslim who has ruled since 2006. In recent weeks, Sunnis by the thousands have carried out a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience, closing off the main roads to Fallouja and Ramadi in the west and mounting demonstrations in Samarra, Baghdad and Mosul.

The rallies are a testament to problems left unresolved when the U.S. military campaign ended here, and to the new tension that has spread throughout the Middle East. Angry citizens of other countries have overthrown entrenched rulers through street protests or armed revolt. In neighboring Syria, Sunnis have risen up [See Iraq, A4]

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