

Community mourns for Edward Lee

By Richard Reyes Fruto
Korea Times

Koreatown has buried its riot dead—volunteer Edward Lee, 18, who died in a confusing crossfire during the Los Angeles upheaval.

Lee died in Koreatown on the second night of rioting. According to some accounts, he and two of his three companions were shot in a gunbattle involving police and two groups of Koreans who mistook the other for rioters.

"I can't say how it happened because there are different stories out there," said childhood friend James Lee. Like others close to the family, James Lee didn't want to talk about the circumstances of the shooting.

"He was not shot by a police officer," said Capt. Julius Davis, commanding officer of Wilshire Division, which covers the western half



Funeral service for Edward Lee held at Ardmore Park.

of Koreatown.

Lee's death compounded the anguish of Korean Americans reeling

from the unrest that shook Los Angeles two weeks ago after four white policemen were acquitted in the beating of a black motorist.

Almost 1,900 businesses were damaged or destroyed in the riots from April 29 to May 1, with the loss of property estimated at \$347 million, according to Radio Korea, one of several groups coordinating relief efforts.

By many estimates, about 50 Korean Americans were hurt in the unrest, including six people who were shot. Most were injured or wounded on April 30 when the looting and burning peaked in Koreatown.

A security guard, 30-year-old Patrick Bettan, was fatally shot in the head at 5 p.m. that day while defending Hannam Market on Olympic Boulevard in Koreatown.

A Hispanic man was also shot dead

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half an hour later in looting at Third Street and Vermont Avenue. The corner's office could not say whether the man was a security guard, looter or bystander.

About 2,000 people braved the hot midday sun at Eddie Lee's funeral in Ardmore Park in Koreatown. Family, friends and strangers wept. A South Korean flag was draped over Lee's mahogany casket.

Rev. Seng Man Lee implored Korean Americans not to be bitter about the loss of a life and their livelihoods, but rather to become agents of peace and justice.

Koreatown's wounded also attended, including In Ha Cho, leader of a veterans group who was shot twice in the leg in front of an electronics store. James Kang, one of Lee's companions, appeared in a wheelchair still clad in hospital pajamas.

Seven young men, all Lee's friends, carried his casket to the hearse, and people tearfully waved white funeral programs in farewell as it pulled away for the burial at Forest Lawn in Hollywood.

According to police, four officers responded to a shooting at San Myun Ok Restaurant at Third Street and Hobart Avenue at about 10:30 p.m. When they arrived on the scene, they observed an exchange of gunfire between two groups, police said.

The officers ordered them to cease fire and drop their weapons, said Lt. John Dunkin of the Los Angeles Police Department's press relations office.

When the suspects didn't comply, the officers shot off 12 rounds, Dunkin said. According to him, the officers found one man dead and two others wounded when the shooting stopped.

The two men also said they were hit before police arrived on the scene, Dunkin said. The officers confiscated 15 handguns and rifles at the scene.

The LAPD is investigating the incident as an officer-involved shooting, and a full report will not be available for a couple of months until the investigation is complete.

The preliminary report does not identify the dead or wounded and does not indicate if they were combatants or people caught in the crossfire, Dunkin said.

The report also does not indicate the identity of people involved in the gunbattle or if officers made any arrests, Dunkin said.

Some accounts of the incident circulating in the Korean community do not corroborate with the police report.

The wounded men told a *Korea Times Korean Edition* reporter that they were caught in a crossfire and were shot in their car as they drove by.

Jay Ahn, Lee's cousin, said the men were shot in their car. James Lee, the dead man's friend, said the same thing. James Lee said he had talked with one of the wounded men a day after the gunbattle.

Dunkin said he didn't know if the dead and wounded were shot in the car.

The *Korea Times Korean Edition* reported that the men were hit by stray bullets from a gunbattle raging between two groups of Koreans on the roof of a restaurant.

According to the newspaper's account, the two groups misidentified the other group in the dark and thought it wanted to loot or torch the restaurant.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported last Monday that Lee was shot by Korean Americans after he was mistaken for a looter.

Lee's friends said he went into Koreatown that night to answer the call to defend businesses from looters and arsonists.

"He just went out there to help the community," said James Lee, who had known him since third grade. "He just thought it was wrong for people to loot and destroy businesses."

A gaggle of young men and women at Lee's wake last Tuesday huddled on the steps of Korean Funeral Home on Washington Boulevard south of Koreatown.

They spoke in hushed voices, if at all. The weather had turned cool, a sharp contrast from the hot days during the riots. A fine, mistlike rain sprinkled the black asphalt parking lot.

James Lee, Alan Cha, Jay Ahn and others remembered Edward Song Lee as an outgoing young man who made friends easily and loved cars and the outdoors.

Eddie Lee was born in the United States and died 24 days short of his 19th birthday. He attended Third Street Elementary School and Los Angeles High School. He was in his first year at Santa Monica College.

"It's still hard for me to believe that he's dead," James Lee said.