

Canyon victim son of Cuban immigrants

By Dan Stephens
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The man shot to death in a remote campground north of San Luis Obispo on Jan. 20 was described by authorities as a transient. But friends of Mariano Francisco Rey knew him as more than a drifter.

Nicknamed "Apache" by his acquaintances, Rey, 30, was a quiet Vietnam veteran who liked living in the wilderness.

Kirk Sampson, a Cal Poly student who knew Rey, said the man was "basically quiet. He just wanted to relax. I can't emphasize how much Apache respected the land and the animals."

Rey, the son of Cuban immigrants, was found dead in his lean-to in Reservoir Canyon about three miles north of San Luis Obispo.

Four men have been arrested in connection with the shooting. All face murder charges.

They are David Rund, Joseph E. Leonard, Erik J. Nelson and Timothy R. Ryan, all of San Luis Obispo.

Police reports said the four were hunting small game when they

heard a sound. Three of them opened fire; Leonard was carrying a flashlight, according to reports.

Rey, a construction worker, had been living in the camp site with another man, Dorian Hawkins, for about six months. Hawkins was not injured.

Friends said Rey didn't talk about his past.

"You don't really ask questions about a person," said Lars Larson, a transient. "He was just a real likeable character."

Rey's family in Miami will not talk about the case.

The Reys, however, have hired an attorney, R. Lewis Van Blois of Oakland, to represent them and to provide a thumbnail sketch of Rey.

Van Blois, a personal injury attorney, said he will file a civil lawsuit in this county. He said the county and the city of San Luis Obispo might be named because a lot of target shooting occurred in Reservoir Canyon.

Van Blois said Rey came to the United States from Cuba in 1959 with his father, mother and two sisters after Fidel Castro seized

power.

"The family had a difficult time. They fled to America with nothing," he said.

As the father eked out a living, his son attended Catholic schools, first in Miami and then in New Jersey, Van Blois said.

The father's hard work paid off. He eventually started his own construction company.

After high school, Rey worked in the business with his father and later joined the Navy.

Van Blois didn't know what Rey did in the Navy. He also didn't know the length of his enlistment.

Van Blois did know that after the hitch, Rey was discharged in California.

About six months ago, Rey ended up in San Luis Obispo.

"He is not any transient. He's good and stable," Van Blois said. "He just loved the mountains of California. That's why he stayed out here."

Van Blois said Rey kept in contact with his parents up until his death.

"The family is very upset over this," Van Blois said. "He was their

only son. They are very upset that this could happen in a country like this."

Despite being dubbed a transient, Rey lived the primitive life in the woods because he chose to; not because he had to, said Sampson, Rey's friend from Cal Poly.

"There is no title to it. It's just the way he liked to live. If there was someone hassling him, he'd just walk away from it," Sampson said. "He was so peaceful because he was so confident in his way."

Rey was accomplished in the martial arts, Sampson said. He also said Rey was "wary of strangers."

Sampson said when Rey got tense, he would chop wood at the campsite to vent his frustrations. "That's where he'd release," he said.

Wood chopping probably would have come in handy if Hawkins and Rey could have followed their dream.

The pair one day wanted to go into the wilderness of Wyoming or Montana to pan for gold. "That's where Apache felt he wanted to go," Sampson said.