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Porn actor suspected of murder jumps off cliff, dies after daylong standoff with police

Stephen Clancy Hill, 34, wielded a samurai sword and threatened to kill himself for eight hours before the fatal plunge. He had been charged with killing a fellow actor and wounding two other workers.

By Joel Rubin and Ruben Vives, Los Angeles Times

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A porn actor suspected of fatally stabbing a former co-worker and wounding two others during a violent rampage died Saturday after he jumped off a cliff following a dramatic, daylong standoff with police in which he threatened to kill himself with a samurai sword.

Stephen Clancy Hill, 34, spent about eight hours on the edge of a rocky cliff in West Hills surrounded by police and talking to crisis negotiators.

With dusk approaching and Hill continuing to threaten to kill himself, members of the Los Angeles Police Department's elite SWAT unit tried to subdue and apprehend him, using a less-than-lethal weapon, said Deputy Chief Kirk Albanese, who oversaw the incident.

Hill, however, threw himself over the cliff at 5:30 p.m. Waiting paramedics rushed him to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead from the injuries he suffered in the roughly 50-foot fall.

Albanese declined to discuss details of the weapon police used and the plan that had been devised to capture Hill, citing the internal investigation that is launched after every serious use of force by officers. It was unclear whether the projectile that officers fired had struck Hill or missed.

"He was bent on taking his own life," Albanese said. "It's very unfortunate. We wanted this to end a different way."

Mental health experts on the scene throughout the day had come to the conclusion that Hill's suicide threats were serious, Albanese said.

With the rough terrain making it difficult to bring in lighting for the nighttime and Hill's level of anxiety rising, Albanese gave the go-ahead for the attempted apprehension.

"We were in a race against time," he said.

The idea of placing a large inflatable mattress at the base of the cliff was rejected by fire officials as unworkable given the rough, steep landscape, Albanese said.

The standoff began about 9:30 a.m. when a caller alerted police after spotting Hill's blue 1998 Toyota RAV4 in the 8800 block of Azul Drive, said Officer Bruce Borihahn.

Officers called the SWAT team and negotiators after Hill made his way up the cliff, where he stood with a sword in hand, pointing it at his chest, Borihahn said. It was not known whether the sword was the weapon used in Tuesday's attack.

Hill had been at large since he attacked several employees at Ultima DVD Inc., a video distribution facility in Van Nuys where he did production work and apparently lived, police and prosecutors said.

Investigators said Hill attacked one man in a back room of the business and then turned toward two colleagues who had rushed over to help the man. Hill allegedly swung the weapon repeatedly and gashed both of them.

The three victims were rushed to Northridge Hospital Medical Center, where Herbert Hin Wong, 30, of Canoga Park was pronounced dead, police said. A second man was treated and released, while the third victim remains in the hospital, Borihahn said.

Wong, a native of China, acted in adult films under the name Tom Dong and appeared with the accused killer in several films.

Investigators are trying to determine if Hill was angry with his colleagues after being informed that he was being fired from his job and evicted from his living quarters.

Hill, of Riverdale, Md., was charged Friday with one count of murder and five counts of attempted murder in connection with Tuesday's attack, according to the Los Angeles County district attorney's office.

Hill, who performed under the name Steve Driver, had been convicted of assault with a firearm involving an instructor on a Maryland college campus in 1998, according to sources familiar with the investigation.

He had threatened a teaching assistant with a handgun if he did not get an A in a class, according to a 1999 article in the Washington Post about the incident.

Hill allegedly told the instructor he was "a mobster and would dismember the instructor's body if he didn't get the grade." During the trial, Hill testified that he threatened to kill the instructor after the teacher requested oral sex, which the instructor denied, according to the article.