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Elephant Goes on Rampage: Famed Trainer Trampled

WOODLAND, Wash. (AP) — The body of Morgan Berry, who raised more than 100 elephants, has been retrieved from a trumpeting bull elephant that alternately tossed it in the air and stood guard over it.

Authorities said Wednesday it may never be known whether Berry, whom a fellow trainer said "could read an elephant's mind," was killed by the elephant on the trainer's private animal farm or died of a heart attack.

Cowlitz County Coroner D.F. Weinbrenner said an autopsy might be conducted today. "The best we may be able to do is to establish whether he (Berry) was alive or not at the time he received his injuries," Weinbrenner said.

Berry, 67, "did have an extremely bad heart," said Gary Waddell, chief criminal sheriff's deputy. "I don't know if they'll be able to tell" if Berry was alive before being trampled by the elephant, he said.

The search for Berry began late Tuesday after he failed to answer a phone call from his son.

The body was recovered after a standoff of several hours between the elephant, Tonga, and neighbors.

Tonga occasionally picked up Berry's body and tossed it around, perhaps without realizing the owner was dead, Waddell said.

Joe Wodaege, who lives near the southwest Washington animal farm, retrieved the body with the help of Berry's son Kenneth. The elephant "made a lunge or two at us when we were dragging the body out," Wodaege said.

Tonga was tethered to a tree and caused no further problems, Waddell said.

Jack McGowan, a spokesman for the Washington Park Zoo in Portland, Ore., which sent experts to the scene, said it was common for bull elephants to guard the body of a person or animal they cared about as a "primitive defense mechanism."

A second elephant, Thai, escaped from the farm and refused to return, attracting more than 100 spectators and tying up traffic on a nearby road. The animal was coaxed onto a borrowed flatbed truck and returned to the farm late Wednesday.

Berry's partner, Eloise Berchtold, 42, was killed by an elephant last May during a circus performance in Rock Forest, Quebec. The elephant had been trained by Berry and Ms. Berchtold at the farm.

That elephant was shot and killed after the incident. No decision has been made on the fate of Tonga.

Terrell Jacobs, a Yakima animal trainer who worked with Berry 10 years ago, said the dead man had "imported more elephants than anyone else.

"He was one of the people who could read an elephant's mind. He could sense what it would do before it happened. He just had a way with elephants after being associated with them so long."

Berry was a classical music graduate of Juilliard School of Music in New York City who became interested in animals while playing in a band on cruise ships. He was an animal trainer for 38 years.

He gave the Portland zoo three elephants, including Belle and Thonglaw, the parents of Packy, who in 1962 became the first elephant to be born and survive in captivity in the Western Hemisphere. Eventually, Thonglaw sired 15 elephants, and the program brought worldwide publicity to the Portland zoo.

Berry "had a whole mess of scars from some leopard once, but he knew no fear," said Dr. Marlowe Dittebrandt, a retired zoologist and longtime friend. "He was never afraid."

She said Berry recently sold all his cats.

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