

Officers calm as they fired tasers, man who shot video says

BY IAN BAILEY VANCOUVER

Robert Dziekanski had his hands raised in surrender when he was tasered by police at Vancouver International Airport, a confrontation that led to his death moments later, says the man who shot video images of the incident that are to be released today.

Paul Pritchard said four officers, who surrounded the 40-year-old Polish immigrant before the tasers were used, seemed unusually at ease about deploying the weapon on Oct. 14.

"They're actually very calm," Mr. Pritchard said yesterday in an interview. "It's frightening how calm they are."

The officers, he added, "look like they should have coffee and cigarettes."

Mr. Dziekanski was not putting up a fight, said Mr. Pritchard, whose video has raised many questions about the police use of tasers. "His demeanour is giving up. He shrugs his shoulders, puts his arms in the air."

Police last week returned the video to Mr. Pritchard after he went to court, arguing that the RCMP had reneged on a commitment to give it back promptly. Now, Mr. Pritchard is eager to see the footage out in the public so people can draw their own conclusions.

He said the video is intact. "What's on the film is what's on the film. All the stuff that needs to be seen is there," he said.

Mr. Dziekanski was in distress after a 10-hour wait in the secure area of the arrivals terminal of Vancouver airport. Unknown to him, his mother, Zofia Cisowski, was waiting outside. Mr. Dziekanski had come to Canada to live with his mother in Kamloops and start a new life. He was eventually disruptive, tipping over a computer as he had tantrum that drew the attention of police. Mr. Pritchard said Mr. Dziekanski, speaking Polish, took a pair of steps away from the four Mounties, who approached him. He turned and was then tasered twice with charges of 50,000 volts.

Mr. Pritchard also said an officer placed his knee and leg on the top of Mr. Dziekanski's neck and head as he was restrained.

GLOBE AND MAIL
NOV. 14, 2007

Mr. Dziekanski, at the end of his first-ever airplane flight, went into medical distress after being zapped with the device and died at the scene. An autopsy and tests of tissues from Mr. Dziekanski have failed to reveal a cause of death.

A spokesman for the police unit investigating the incident said it is too soon for investigators to comment on what the video shows.

"We're in the process of conducting a fair and unbiased investigation, and to make comments on evidence prior to the completion of the investigation and pending inquest would be highly counterproductive," said Corporal Dale Carr of the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

"We won't be commenting on the video and its contents because the officers involved and the investigative team will be testifying under oath at the time of the inquest."

Officers involved in the confrontation with Mr. Dziekanski remain on duty. Charges are possible, said Cpl. Carr, depending on the outcome of the in-custody, sudden-death probe.

The Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP last week announced an investigation into the death of Mr. Dziekanski.

And yesterday, the B.C. Civil Liberties Association filed a formal complaint against the RCMP, alleging misrepresentation of the facts in the case and unreasonably seizing and actively suppressing the video recording by Mr. Pritchard.

"The BCCLA is concerned that the RCMP attempted to misrepresent facts and spin a story of the event that would place their officers in a favourable light. Added to this, the RCMP sought to suppress public disclosure of a video that will likely cast their officers actions in a very negative light," a statement from the association said.

"This kind of public manipulation is not appropriate nor dignified for Canada's national police force."