

## Torrance

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million award against the city, which Torrance is appealing.

"It's the last case of any consequence or significance involving the Police Department," said City Attorney Kenneth Nelson said. "It's a good department and it's had some bad cases lately, but they're over."

The Coyle case began May 9, 1988.

At 11 p.m., Coyle, then a Torrance resident, maneuvered his motorcycle out of a gas station and stopped near 226th Street and Western Avenue. Then he waited for a friend, who also was buying gas.

Officer Timothy Pappas, apparently believing the motorcyclist was acting suspiciously, pulled up in a squad car and pointed his cocked .45-caliber pistol at Coyle. Officers Timothy Thornton and Mark Holden arrived.

Originally, the three officers claimed Pappas fired a single shot as Coyle — held by Holden — lunged for a shiny object in his pocket. They claimed self-defense.

But four months later, Thornton admitted Coyle did not make dramatic movements and had even removed the wrench as ordered — before Pappas fired.

Pappas eventually acknowledged this, saying he shot Coyle after the motorcyclist moved his hand slightly.

"His hand went down a bit ... and I just

reacted," Pappas said.

The shooting left a heavy mark on the four men directly involved.

The bullet, which ripped through Coyle's chin, remains lodged in the neck of the burly man, who will never recover fully. His body is partially paralyzed on his right side. Blurred vision, dizzy spells and a limp have become a way of life.

For the immediate future, so has jail. In July, Coyle was sentenced to a year in jail for methamphetamine arrests in July 1987 and November 1989. With credit for time served and good behavior, he could be released as early as this month.

The city fired the three officers, who also faced criminal charges.

Pappas, the officer who shot Coyle, pleaded no contest in Los Angeles Superior Court to filing a false report and interfering with an officer. He was fined \$1,000 and given a year's probation.

Holden pleaded no contest to interfering with a police investigation and received the same fine and probation as Pappas.

And Thornton was granted immunity for agreeing to testify against his two former co-workers.

### Sympathy for officers

Before Pappas and Holden were sentenced, Coyle told *The Daily Breeze*, "I feel sad for the officers, very much so, because they also have families. ... I wish them the best and maybe they can go on with their lives like I have to.

"We all got hurt. It's just a different hurt for

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— City Attorney Kenneth Nelson

them."

Torrance's recent court troubles began Aug. 30, 1984, when off-duty Sgt. Rollo Green turned his pickup truck into the path of motorcyclist Kelly Rastello, 19, who was killed.

A Los Angeles Superior Court jury faulted Green for the death, ruled other officers tried to cover up the sergeant's blame and determined there was a pattern of whitewashing and misconduct in the Police Department.

The jury levied a \$5.5 million award against the city, and Judge Abby Soven ordered Torrance to pay the Rastello family's attorneys \$2.1 million. Torrance is appealing the case.

On Christmas Eve in 1986, police allegedly broke the neck of a man just before he was booked into Torrance city jail on suspicion of drunken driving. A settlement reached in August calls for the city to pay Francisco Yuri \$1.1 million.

Also, six men who claimed they were unjustly

beaten by Torrance officers at a party in 1988 accepted a \$105,000 settlement in December. A party-goer's videotape, broadcast by television networks, shows an officer clubbing an apparently unconscious man while another officer gripped the victim in a choke-hold.

Panish's firm — Greene, Broillet, Taylor and Wheeler — also is representing the Rastello family. On Wednesday, he lambasted the Torrance City Council for not making changes in the Police Department after the string of suits.

### A haunting past?

Panish said Torrance officials settled the Coyle case because they feared a result similar to the Rastello case, and because they wanted to avoid a trial that would review in public more of the department's wrongdoings.

But Deputy Chief Jim Popp said the Police Department handled the Coyle case professionally after learning of a cover-up.

"We have all learned from this situation. It is unfortunate," Popp said. "It is not representative of the whole department.

"We run a good, clean department with a lot of integrity."

Councilman Timothy Mock said, "It's an exceptional Police Department. I think it's one of the best around. ... It was a just settlement. Hopefully, it will be the last one."

*Contributing to this article was staff writer Kim Frick.*