Diana’s Death Story

Paris, Sunday, Aug. 31 -- Diana, the Princess of Wales, was killed shortly after midnight today in an automobile accident in a tunnel by the Seine. The accident also killed Emad Mohammed al-Fayed, the Harrods heir, and their driver, the police said.

Diana's death was announced this morning by the Interior Minister, Jean-Pierre Chevenement. She died after being hospitalized in intensive care at the Pitie-Salpetriere Hospital in southeast Paris.

A bodyguard was seriously injured, according to a police spokesman. 'The car was being chased by photographers on motorcycles, which could have caused the accident,' a spokesman for the Prefecture of Police said. Several motorcyclists were detained for questioning after the crash, Reuters reported, quoting police officials.

The Princess, 36, was divorced from Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales and heir to the British throne, last year. She had vacationed with Mr. al-Fayed, 41, the son of Harrods's owner, Mohammed al-Fayed, on the French Riviera earlier this month and had been expected to return to London today to be with her two sons, the Princes William and Harry. [Obituaries of Diana and Mr. al-Fayed appear on page 31.]

French radio stations reported that a spokesman for the British royal family in London expressed anger and said the accident was predictable because photographers relentlessly pursued the Princess wherever she went.

The crash occurred 35 minutes past midnight in the Alma Tunnel, on the right bank of the Seine under the Place de l'Alma, the police said.

The driver was hired from the Ritz Hotel in Paris. The Princess and Mr. al-Fayed had been pursued from the Ritz Hotel, where they were believed to be staying after spending time together on the Riviera.

The Paris police said that the Interior Minister, Jean-Pierre Chevenement, and the Prefect of Police, Philippe Massoni, had accompanied the British Ambassador in Paris to the hospital where the Princess was treated.

The police said the car was totally wrecked. The impact was so great, the car's radiator was hurled onto the knees of the front-seat passenger. The Princess was in the back seat.

The site of the accident, in the Eighth Arrondissement, is on a high-speed road along the Seine with a divided roadway as it passes under the Place de l'Alma to the Place de la Concorde.

On Aug. 21, Diana and Mr. al-Fayed, who is of Egyptian ancestry and is commonly called Dodi, flew to the French Mediterranean resort of St. Tropez for their third holiday in each other's company in five weeks. Mr. al-Fayed's father said in an interview with The New York Times in London last week that the two were simply 'young people getting to know each other.'

British newspapers reported that Diana first met Mr. al-Fayed almost 10 years ago when he and Prince Charles played polo on opposing teams. Films he had produced or co-produced included the 1981 Oscar-winning 'Chariots of Fire,' 'The World According to Garp,' 'F/X' and 'Hook.'

Reportedly a multimillionaire, Mr. al-Fayed had homes in London, New York, Los Angeles and Switzerland and a garage full of luxury cars. He was divorced after a marriage that lasted eight months in 1994. Diana was catapulted into the public eye at age 19 in 1981 when it was announced that she was engaged to Charles, the heir to the British throne and 12 years her senior.

The couple were married on July 29 that year in London in a ceremony watched by millions and billed as a 'fairy-tale wedding.'

Diana soon became a mother, to Prince William in June 1982, but by the birth of her second son, Harry, in September 1984, her biographer Andrew Morton wrote in 'Diana: Her True Story,' she was already suffering from bulimia and had attempted suicide five times.

From 1986, the first press stories began appearing of cracks in the marriage, and Mr. Morton later wrote that Charles had resumed his relationship with a married friend, Camilla Parker Bowles, at that time.