

Officers erred in shopping mall shooting, board finds; The final shots at a man with a knife who was on the ground went against policy, Commission reports.

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FULL TEXT

The man ran through the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw shopping mall, armed with a foot-long kitchen knife.

It was a Tuesday evening, and the mall was crowded with shoppers.

When he wouldn't drop the knife, two Los Angeles police officers began shooting at the man. After he fell to the ground and tried to get up, still gripping the knife, each officer sent one more bullet his way.

On Tuesday, the Los Angeles Police Commission ruled that the last round fired by each officer in the fatal shooting of Grechario Mack on April 10, 2018, violated department policy to use deadly force only when protecting oneself or others from imminent injury or death.

The unanimous decision by the five-member civilian oversight board contradicted Chief Michel Moore, who had concluded that all five shots from one officer and all nine shots from the other officer were in policy.

Moore will now decide what discipline the officers should face, and L.A. County Dist. Atty. Jackie Lacey will determine whether they are to be criminally charged.

Shortly after Mack's death, then-Police Chief Charlie Beck said a beanbag shotgun would have been "the most appropriate tool for this."

"It's an unfortunate incident that of course we would have liked to have avoided," Beck told the Police Commission.

"Unfortunately, we were not able to get less-lethal in place in time to do that."

Police Commission President Steve Soboroff said he could not comment on the decision because it was reached in a closed-session meeting.

Mack's family celebrated the commission's decision with Black Lives Matter activists outside LAPD headquarters on Tuesday.

Quintus Moore, Mack's father, said he is pleased with the out-of-policy finding for the final shots. He wants the officers to face criminal prosecution.

"I'd like them sitting in jail with the people they put in jail and think twice about what they do," he said.

Mack, 30, had two daughters and loved fishing so much that he was buried near a creek, his father said.

The commission has ruled the use of deadly force in some controversial shootings as out of policy, as in the 2014 death of Ezell Ford.

But in others, including Charly Leundeu Keunang's 2015 death on skid row, the commission decided that the fatal shots were in line with LAPD policy.

The union that represents rank-and-file LAPD officers defended Sgt. Ryan Lee and Officer Martin Robles, identified by the department as the two who shot Mack.

"The officers involved strived to resolve this situation without using force but the suspect continued his aggressive and threatening behavior," the Los Angeles Police Protective League Board of Directors said in a statement. "They were forced to take split-second actions and based on witness statements at the time, mall patrons feared for their own safety because of the obvious harm this suspect presented to their lives."

David Winslow, an attorney who represents both officers, said they were concerned that Mack would enter a store and slash the customers with the knife – a decision-making process that encompassed the last shots.

"They had to act quickly, decide whether to shoot or not, how to protect the public from a threat," Winslow said. A report to the Police Commission by Moore describes a chaotic situation in a mall full of shoppers, with Mack appearing to be in a state of "agitated delirium."

Two sergeants repeatedly ordered Mack, who was African American, to drop the knife, according to the report. They discussed using a Taser, but after an officer with a beanbag shotgun arrived, a sergeant shouted to use the less-lethal weapon. Mack then ran toward stores with shoppers inside, the report said.

The sergeant involved in the shooting fired four shots with his handgun.

"I wasn't going to allow this guy, or the suspect with a knife, to run into one of these stores and hurt anybody that was in those stores, or hurt any officers that were coming up and they were approaching," the sergeant told LAPD investigators.

He explained his final, fifth shot: "I realized that after he went down, he was trying to get back up ... And he was also in front of a very large retail store with numerous patrons inside. And so I fired again to stop the threat."

The officer who shot nine times was equipped with a semiautomatic rifle.

After Mack fell to the ground, the officer said, "he's 10, 15 feet away from me and the people behind me. And it looks like he's getting ready to charge at me. So I take another shot at him as I'm giving him commands to drop the knife, not to grab it, and because I think he's going to come up and slash us again."

After the Police Commission announced its decision, Mack's mother, Catherine Walker, danced and prayed while waving a purple heart case containing her son's ashes.

Black Lives Matter activist Paula Minor declared the decision "a success, not a victory," pointing to what she described as unfair treatment of blacks by police.

Caption: PHOTO: TWO OFFICERS confronted a man with a knife at the Baldwin Hills Crenshaw mall in April 2018.

PHOTOGRAPHER:Luis Sinco Los Angeles Times

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