

How an arrest turned deadly - Witnesses describe - Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA) - January 21, 2018 - page A1

January 21, 2018 | Patriot-News, The (Harrisburg, PA) | Christine Vendel | Page A1

DEPUTY U.S. MARSHAL SLAIN

The sound of gunshots roused residents out of bed in the 1800 block of Mulberry Street early Thursday and several of them peered outside to see what was going on.

That's when they witnessed a life-or-death gunbattle playing out in front of them between a wanted man and several police officers.

The neighbors didn't know it at the time, but the wanted man had just shot two officers from a U.S. Marshals Service fugitive apprehension team inside the home.

One of the officers was hit in the chest through a gap in the side of his bullet-resistant vest, according to sources, and he later died. The other officer suffered an injury to his arm.

After hearing about six gunshots from inside the house, several neighbors saw the gunman barge out the front door while holding a gun. Several officers already were stationed outside. The gunman had his gun pointed at an officer in the street in front of him, according to neighbors.

The gunman dove head-first off the front porch, into the snow and slid behind a parked car. He then popped up between the cars and fired at offi

cers as officers returned gunfire.

Diane Stinson said she saw an officer shooting over the top of a parked PT Cruiser toward where her car was parked.

The gunman crept around a parked car and then ran down the street, according to Stinson and other neighbors, as officers fired at him. The gunman darted back in between two parked cars, and officers lost sight of him in the darkness.

An officer walked down the sidewalk with a flashlight as a neighbor pointed out where the gunman was last seen.

That's when the officer spotted the gunman hiding under a vehicle.

"Don't move!" the officer shouted.

Neighbors then heard the officer fire about 15 gunshots. After that, another officer pointed a rifle to the gunman's head and repeated the command, "Don't move."

The officers handcuffed the gunman and moved his body to the middle of the street, where he died.

Meanwhile, other officers were working furiously to remove the wounded officers from the back of the house and get them to hospitals.

Deputy U.S. Marshal Christopher D. Hill, 45, died at a hospital from his injuries. He was described as highly trained and the “cream of the crop.” York city Officer Kyle Pitts underwent surgery for a wound to his arm.

A Harrisburg officer stationed outside the home was struck in the chest by a projectile, but his bullet-resistant vest bolstered with a steel plate protected him.

A team of seven officers executed the arrest warrant Thursday, according to U.S. Marshal Martin Pane and all members were wearing body armor.

The task force comprises federally employed marshals, such as Hill, as well as local officers who are deputized to serve on the task force.

While all members were protected by bullet-resistant vests, in some situations like Thursday, gunfire can hit officers in areas not protected by vests.

Law enforcement officials provided a brief description of the shootout at a 2 p.m. news conference Thursday. But neighbors on Friday provided more details from their vantage points after officers took down the crime scene tape that had previously locked down the block.

Many of the vehicles parked in the area of the shooting bore visible bullet holes on Friday.

The property owner where the shooting took place allowed PennLive/The Patriot-News into the home, where a repairman was patching up more than a dozen bullet holes. The house had been thoroughly searched by investigators and left in disarray with piles of clothing and personal belongings mixed with framed photos and children’s athletic trophies.

Bullet holes inside the home were concentrated in walls near the stairwell, where officials say the gunman surprised officers from the second-floor. The officers had been handcuffing Shayla Towles Pierce and preparing to search the rest of the home when bullets suddenly rained down.

Pierce, 30, had lived at the rented home for three years with her children and she was the focus of the arrest warrant for allegedly pointing a gun at the head of a driver last year.

Neighbors said **Kevin Sturgis**, 31, of Philadelphia, was Pierce’s boyfriend and that he had been staying at the home for about five months. Officials have declined to establish their relationship.

As it turned out, he also was wanted for failing to appear in two separate court cases from Philadelphia.

After Sturgis shot officers and fled the home, neighbors said Pierce ran onto the front porch amid the chaos and shouted to officers outside: "Don't kill him! Don't kill him!"

Pierce's relatives returned to the home Friday to collect personal belongings for Pierce and her children. Pierce remained behind bars with a \$200,000 bail.

The children had been inside the home during the initial volley of gunfire Thursday, and then ushered out the back door, according to neighbors.

The relatives did not want to comment to PennLive/The Patriot-News, but Pierce's father said of Thursday's tragedy: "It wasn't her. It was him."

The U.S. Marshal's team recognized the potential violence that could come with serving the high-risk warrant, which is why it was scheduled at 6 a.m. But many details from inside the house still remain unknown as federal and state investigators methodically interview witnesses and officers and compare physical evidence from the scene.

Newly seated U.S. Attorney David Freed hinted in his comments that there could be a larger story behind why the elite federal task force was sent to the home.

As far as decision to use the marshal's service, Freed said, "It's not just every warrant out there that the locals call up the marshals and say let's go grab this person."

Freed said more information would come out later about the reasons for the tactical raid. "Although we don't know at this point," he said, "we will know what the larger purpose was for them being there."

The bullet holes inside the home were marked with evidence numbers for tracking purposes, but the numbers aren't necessarily indicative of the sequential status of each gunshot.

)Bullets and fragments removed from walls and recovered from the scene will be compared to officers' guns and the gunman's weapon.

The FBI has taken the lead on a criminal investigation that could potentially lead to additional charges against Pierce.

The Dauphin County district attorney's office is heading the investigation into whether the fatal police shooting of Sturgis was justified.

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