

Pennsylvania police officer told authorities he 'f---d up' after fatal shooting

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FULL TEXT

A rookie police officer who, according to authorities, said he had "f---d up" and "didn't know what to do" when he fatally shot an unarmed man in Pennsylvania has been charged with voluntary manslaughter, prosecutors said Tuesday.

South Whitehall Township Police Officer Jonathan Roselle, 33, whose US Army service included a tour in Afghanistan, had been on the job about six months when he encountered 44-year-old Joseph Santos on the afternoon of July 28, Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin said in a statement.

Moments earlier, a motorist pulled up alongside the officer and said a man had tried to get into her car, according to the statement. When Roselle pulled his car up to Santos, Santos was bleeding. He banged on the officer's side window, mounted the hood and banged on the windshield.

The officer drew his gun, repeatedly ordered Santos to get away from the car and radioed for help, Martin said. Santos walked away a short distance before turning around and walking back toward the officer.

"Get down on the ground," Roselle, now standing outside his car, told the man.
"Don't do it," Santos, who lived in New Jersey, told the officer.

As Santos got closer, Roselle fired five times, according to the prosecutor's statement. Santos was pronounced dead at a local hospital. The cause of death was found to be multiple gunshot wounds. After the shooting, protesters and counterprotesters gathered near the scene in support of Santos and the officer.

Roselle is the second Pennsylvania officer charged in connection with a fatal shooting this summer. On June 27, East Pittsburgh police Officer Michael Rosfeld was charged with criminal homicide in the shooting death of 17-year-old Antwon Rose II, according to court records.

Antwon was shot in the face, right arm and the middle of his back, the criminal complaint said. The young man was in a car suspected in an earlier shooting but did not appear to be the shooter. The complaint also said Rosfeld made inconsistent statements about whether he believed Antwon had a gun when the officer opened fire.

After the Santos shooting, Roselle told an officer at the scene that he thought he "f---d up" and "didn't know what to do" when Santos came at him, according to Martin. He repeated the assertion that he had made a mistake to others later. The prosecutor said the officer could have engaged Santos with his baton, pepper spray or Taser.

"This tragic incident is a reminder that split-second decisions can have grave consequences," South Whitehall Township Police Chief Glen Dorney told reporters Tuesday.

Martin said Santos may have been asking people on the boulevard for help.

"In this case, there is no evidence that Mr. Santos was armed with any weapon and no evidence that he had committed or attempted to commit a forcible felony," the prosecutor said in his statement. Roselle's "belief that he needed to defend himself with deadly force" was unreasonable and unjustified, the statement said.

Martin said that when Santos turned back toward the officer, he was walking.

"He was not running or rushing," the statement said. "He did not have anything visible in his hands; he was not clenching his fists; he did not present a threatening posture."

Additionally, the statement said Santos is heard on video, as the officer points a gun at him, saying "Don't do it."

"While it is true that Mr. Santos failed to comply with the officer's legitimate commands to get down on the ground,

there is no objective (evidence) that Officer Roselle was in danger of imminent serious bodily injury or death." Roselle has been placed on administrative leave. His attorney, Gavin Holihan, said in a statement that the officer believes "his actions were justified and appropriate based on the facts and circumstances evident at the time." "He believes that when all of the evidence is presented publicly, any fair citizen will reach the same conclusion he reached: that the deadly force used on July 28 was justified and appropriate."

Martin said the shooting was "the act of a relatively inexperienced officer who held a subjective fear for his own safety; but, made a decision which objectively was unreasonable in light of the facts."

At a news conference Tuesday, Dorney offered thoughts and prayers to the Santos family as well as Roselle and his family. "I know this decision does not bring closure to Mr. Joseph Santos' family, but it may help gain some," he said.

He said of Roselle, "Knowing Jonathan as I do, he is a man of honor and integrity and a good person to the core. This incident does not change that."

Roselle graduated from the Allentown Police Academy in December 2017 and later underwent 13 weeks of field training, the statement said. He is a major in the National Guard.

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