

Officers Knew Her. What About the One Who Killed Her?

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FULL TEXT

The police had visited the home of a Queens woman nine times over the past two decades before she was fatally shot by an officer on Monday, police officials said. The most recent encounter was earlier this month when she was said to be acting irrationally.

On Monday, when the woman, Susan Muller, 54, called the police to report an armed burglar in her home, officers from the local precinct where her troubles were most known were away mourning a colleague who died last week. The four officers who responded were from three nearby precincts helping out, and it was unclear if they had asked or been told by dispatchers about the history of police calls to the home, the police said.

Officials released more details about the encounter on Tuesday as the investigation continued and questions swirled about the police response.

The police had responded to nine 911 calls to the home since August 2000, officials said. Four of the incidents involved domestic violence, and three other times were about someone being intoxicated. Twice Ms. Muller was acting irrationally, the police said, including the most recent incident on Sept. 9, when she was taken to a hospital for treatment.

On Monday, her call to 911 was a lure, the police said. Ms. Muller, who identified herself as the caller, lunged at the responding officers with a 10-inch kitchen knife inside the home at 52-14 69th Street in Maspeth, officials said. One of the officers fatally shot her in the chest, according to the police.

Edward Rogers, Ms. Muller's partner for the past five years and a retired police officer, said she had been drinking and asked him for a ride home on Monday from Grand Avenue in Flushing. When he arrived to pick her up, he said, "she was acting like a lunatic talking to everyone on the street."

Once at her house, things got worse.

"She started yelling, 'I hate you!' So I left," Mr. Rogers said. "Thirty minutes later she was dead."

Officials said police body cameras did not capture much of what happened inside the home, including the shooting, but did record the sound. An officer's voice can be heard summoning her to the back of the apartment, police officials said. Within seconds, a woman shrieks and an officer can be heard saying, "Drop the knife!" Then, three gunshots rang out: "Bang, bang, bang," a police official said.

None of the officers were hurt or have been involved in a shooting before, according to the police.

Officials did not disclose the officers' names, but said that only one of the officers had specialized training for handling people in mental or emotional crisis.

Neighbors described previous occasions when they detected signs of heavy drinking, like the smell of alcohol on Ms. Muller's breath or beer cans left on her porch. They also described often hearing loud disputes between the couple.

Young Kim, 62, a neighbor, said she often heard loud arguments coming from Ms. Muller's apartment and saw ambulances take her away from time to time.

"She a sick person," said Ms. Kim, who was angry that the police used deadly force. "She was depressed, walked

with head down, like a zombie."

Fighting back tears, Mr. Rogers described Ms. Muller as "a very nice person, a very sweet girl, but if she picked up a drink her personality changed. She couldn't have a drink, then all bets are off."

He said that despite their fierce arguments she had never raised any kind of a weapon at him. Nor had she ever spoken of physically harming anyone associated with the police, he added.

"I can't understand how she would do something like that to a police officer when she was living with me and we were living off a police pension," he said.

Credit: ASHLEY SOUTHALL and NATE SCHWEBER; Susan C. Beachy contributed research.

Photograph

The police at a home in Maspeth, Queens, where they said Susan Muller had called 911, then lunged at officers with a knife. (PHOTOGRAPH BY ULI SEIT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES); Susan Muller

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