

Police chief: Unclear if homeowner heard orders to drop gun

Slevin, Colleen . AP English Language News (includes AP 50 State Report) ; New York [New York]03 Aug 2018.

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FULL TEXT

DENVER (AP) - Thirty-three seconds after arriving at a suburban Denver home where a man had broken in and attacked an 11-year-old boy, police officers heard shots fired inside.

An armed man came into view, police said Thursday, refusing five orders to drop his gun. He started to come toward officers and raise a flashlight he held in his other hand.

An officer fired four rounds, killing 73-year-old Richard Black, Aurora Police Chief Nick Metz said in the department's first detailed account of the shooting early Monday.

The officers soon found the intruder - 26-year-old Dajon Harper - dead in a bathroom from shots Black fired to protect his grandson. Those were the shots officers heard after arriving at the chaotic scene.

Metz said he did not hear the uniformed officers identify themselves as police in body camera video. He acknowledged that Black, a decorated Vietnam veteran, had a "significant hearing impairment" from his military service that may have made it hard for him to hear the orders to drop his gun.

Police will not release bodycam footage yet, citing the wishes of the Black family and prosecutors who will decide whether to charge the unidentified officer who opened fire.

Portions of the audio and video are hard to understand because of background noise, including screaming, but the police chief said a forensic review will try to clear it up.

A family lawyer said Black's wife, Jeanette, gave an emergency dispatcher physical descriptions of Black, her son and the intruder, but Metz said those were not found on any of the 911 recordings.

Black was white, and Harper was black.

The Black family said in a statement released by police that Jeanette Black's 911 call was difficult to understand and acknowledged the police department's position that the officers did not receive descriptions.

Jeanette Black was heard on bodycam footage saying, "He has a gun," as police arrived, but Metz said he does not know if the officer heard that.

In one of several 911 recordings released Thursday night, a woman who identified herself as Harper's mother told the dispatcher that her son was on drugs but was unarmed.

"He's literally kicked in some people across the street door. ... He's on some type of drug or something," she said frantically. "He's running through the neighborhood busting cars, busting in people's doors while they sleep. I don't know what he's on. He's bleeding."

The woman later said Harper is "hurting this little baby. He kicked in their door."

Harper, who was released from prison in February after serving time for weapons and menacing charges, broke into the home by knocking open the front door. He had left a party across the street, where he became out of control, acting irrationally and damaging cars, Metz said.

Some partygoers followed him into Black's house to try to get Harper to come back, adding to the confusion. Others were standing outside with Black's wife when police arrived.

The police chief said Black acted heroically to protect his family but also defended the actions of his officers,

including the one who killed Black, a fellow military veteran who was involved in another fatal police shooting just over a month ago.

The officer returned to duty 14 days after that shooting, which Metz said was much longer than the minimum three days of leave recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

"They were not reckless. These officers responded how I would expect them to respond, given the very limited information they had," he said.

Sighing and looking down at the floor, Metz said the body camera video was heartbreaking.

"I can tell you that when my folks sat around the table and first saw it - and I'm talking about police personnel who have been on the job 25, 30 years who have seen just about everything - there wasn't a dry eye around the table," the chief said.

"It is very horrific to watch, not just from the standpoint of watching a man who saved his family get shot but also knowing what that little boy was subjected to," he said.

In their statement, the Black family urged people not to threaten or harass police because of what happened, noting that Richard Black deeply appreciated law enforcement.

Associated Press writer Thomas Peipert contributed to this report.

Credit: By COLLEEN SLEVIN, Associated Press

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