

The News Tribune  
January 28, 2001  
Edition: South Sound  
Section: South Sound/Local  
Page: B1

Topics:

Index Terms:

Local/State

Crime, Police, Shooting, Death, Pierce County

Crime, Law and Justice -- Crime and Criminal

Woman with gun shot, killed by deputy

SUICIDAL: 35-year-old turns weapon on sheriff's deputies who had been called to help distraught mother of 4

Author: Kim Eckart; The News Tribune

Article Text:

A Pierce County sheriff's deputy shot and killed a distraught woman early Saturday when she refused to give up her gun and turned the weapon on him.

Mary Ramroth, 35, died of multiple gunshot wounds at 1:35 a.m., the Pierce County Medical Examiner's Office said. The shooting occurred in a home in the 6400 block of Waller Road. Officials did not release the name of the 24-year-old deputy who has worked for the sheriff's office for almost three years. He has been placed on three days' paid, administrative leave - common procedure for any officer-involved shooting, Pierce County sheriff's spokesman Ed Troyer said.

The deputy had no record of involvement in past shootings.

Troyer gave the following account of events:

- \* A man called 911 at 12:03 a.m. to report his girlfriend was firing a gun in the house and was saying she wanted to die. The man said he had fled the house with her 13-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter.

- \* Deputies arrived at 12:09 a.m. and attempted to establish contact with Ramroth from outside the house. At 1:12 a.m., the deputies heard a shot fired inside.

- \* Thinking Ramroth had shot herself, three deputies - one of whom was a supervisor - entered the home and found her crouched in a closet, with a .40-caliber handgun in her mouth. The deputies asked Ramroth to put the gun down.

- \* At 1:16 a.m., Ramroth pointed the gun at one of the deputies, who stood 10 to 12 feet away, and yelled an obscenity. The deputy fired multiple times.

- \* Paramedics, who had arrived on the scene when deputies were called, worked on Ramroth until she was pronounced dead at 1:35 a.m.

Ramroth was said to be depressed and suicidal for some time and had talked with family members about her problems, Troyer said. She was separated from her husband and, in addition to her son and daughter, had 3-year-old twin boys, Troyer said.

The sheriff's spokesman said deputies respond to these types of incidents with the hope of resolving the problem.

"This is just a good example of how things can change quickly," Troyer said. "People's emotions are going quickly in domestic situations, and rational people act irrationally.

"Here you have a situation where our guys heard a shot and went in thinking they were helping her, and in a split second, the gun is turned on them."

Deputies are "trained to stop the threat" and to shoot in the torso area, he added.

Neither Troyer nor the medical examiner's office said where the woman was shot or how many times.

The shooting is the first fatal, officer-involved incident since 1999, Troyer said.

According to procedure, both the sheriff's department and the Pierce County Prosecutor's Office will investigate the shooting.

The Board of Professional Standards, which is made up of sheriff's employees, also will review whether the deputy followed department policy and procedure.

Neighbors said Saturday they knew little about Ramroth but had not seen or heard any evidence of fighting or other problems at the home.

They described her boyfriend, who was not identified by deputies, as a hard-working, friendly man who lived in the pale yellow house for the past few years.

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Caption:

BW ILLUSTRATION - MAP / Fred Matamoros/The News Tribune: Woman shot and killed after turning her gun on police (B2, See Microfilm)

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