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Officers shoot, kill man suspected of car theft

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Article Text:

Two veteran Milwaukee police officers Thursday shot and killed a man suspected of stealing a car, after the man backed the car into the officers' unmarked squad car, pinning one of the officers.

The shooting, which took place shortly after noon Thursday, was the second police shooting in less than a month.

On Thursday, Police Chief Arthur Jones said two warrant squad officers followed a man suspected of driving a stolen car into an alley in the 2600 block of S. 8th St. When the officers began to exit their squad car to approach the white convertible, the man shifted the car into reverse, pinning one of the officers.

Both officers fired at the suspect, striking the 34-year-old man at least once in the head. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The injured officer suffered a minor leg bruise.

Two other passengers in the car were not injured. They were being questioned by police.

The convertible allegedly was stolen sometime Wednesday. The suspect was wanted for armed robbery, police said.

Heard shots

Gail Kreinus, who lives next door to the house where the shooting took place, said she was next to her kitchen window when she heard shots fired.

"I heard the cops say, 'Stop!' " she said. "And this woman started screaming. And then I saw the body in the car."

Jones said it was unclear whether the victim intended to use the convertible as a weapon. He did not know if the victim was armed.

Jones said the police department's internal affairs would investigate whether the officers were justified in killing the man.

"I don't like to prejudge incidents," he said. "I just will reserve comments."

Police said the officers involved in the shooting were Richard "Rick" Sandoval and Karl Zuberbier. Zuberbier was a former sniper with the Milwaukee Police Department's Tactical Unit. Sandoval was nearly shot in the head in 1992 when a suspected drug dealer fired at Sandoval and fellow officer Richard Jaeger. A gunbattle erupted between the officers and the suspect, William Thornton, when police served a narcotics search warrant at Thornton's duplex in the 3300 block of N. 4th St.

Thornton, then 21, was later sentenced to 23 years in prison for the incident. No action was taken against either of the officers, records show.

The shooting comes less than a month after a homicide detective shot and killed Laron Ball on

May 29. The shooting occurred after Ball attempted to escape the courtroom when jurors found him guilty of murder.

One sheriff's deputy was shot by his own gun in a struggle with Ball before Ball was killed.

Three jurors for the case since have filed claims against the county for negligence and unnecessary endangerment because sheriff's deputies failed to fit Ball with a stun belt as a way to control him in the courtroom.

Problem area

Neighbors have been trying to get the house where the shooting took place cleaned up by calling Ald. Bob Donovan, said Kreinus, 52.

Donovan said he actually had planned to do a neighborhood walk in the area at 2 p.m.

Thursday but canceled at the last minute to visit another problem area.

Donovan said he had contacted the landlord and been informed that the tenants had been served an eviction notice and that the property was for sale. There was a "For Sale" sign in the yard.

"It's been a problem property," he said. "We have been making attempts to address it. But I tell you -- we are inundated. There are a lot of properties similar to this one."

Donovan thought Thursday's incident would expedite the process of cleaning up the property.

But, he added, "It's unfortunate that it comes to that." Residents in the area of Thursday's shooting seemed interested, but not surprised, by the incident.

Neighbors said the area had become increasingly violent.

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