

Seattle Post-Intelligencer (WA)

August 15, 2001

Edition: Final

Section: News

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CHRONOLOGY

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DRUGS MAY HAVE FED RAMPAGE

POLICE SEEK ANSWERS TO RAINIER BEACH TRAGEDY

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Article Text:

For 10 straight days, Devon Jackson, an ex-convict with a rap sheet seething with violence, booze and drugs, smoked a potent concoction of marijuana dipped in embalming fluid, police say.

His drug binge wouldn't end until a murderous Monday night tragedy - during a rampage inside a Rainier Beach triplex that left his 20-year-old friend and a toddler dead, and his 6-year-old niece critically wounded.

The trouble started shortly after 7 p.m., police say, when Jackson visited Apartment B at 9273 51st Ave. S. - the home of his close friend, Donte Coleman. But somehow, neighbors say, the two buddies erupted into a screaming match, and then, bullets flew.

It ended about a half-hour later, after Jackson, trying in vain to fire his apparently unloaded gun at a swarm of officers converging in the streets below, jumped from a second-story balcony in a last-ditch effort to escape, police say.

Jackson, 20, of Kent was mortally wounded on a nearby street, cut down by bullets from three police officers guns' after he swirled and pointed a .45-caliber handgun at police, authorities say. Officers found Coleman dead of a gunshot wound to his trunk in the living room of his apartment. In the next-door unit, they found 23-month-old TreVieon Spruel lying in the living room, his head bludgeoned so brutally by the butt of a handgun that police at first couldn't tell if he was stabbed, shot or beaten.

And in a bathroom nearby, 6-year-old Samunique Wilson, the daughter of Jackson's sister-in-law, clung to life with her own massive head wounds. The girl now may be alive only because of Officer Dana Duffy, a former emergency room nurse who performed CPR on her limp body. She was listed late yesterday in stable but serious condition at Harborview Medical Center.

A day after the rampage, police officials could not fully explain what sparked the violence. Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske described the crime scene as "horrific," and questioned whether veteran officers would be able to shake the gruesome images from their minds.

But police suggested that Jackson's alleged rampage was induced by his latest drug of choice: pot soaked in embalming fluid, known on the streets as "sherm," that creates psychotic effects similar to PCP.

Drug experts say the dangerous concoction can cause hallucinations, as well as "paranoia and extreme anger," Kerlikowske added.

Witnesses told police that Jackson had been smoking "sherm" for the past 10 days, and at times, violently confronted people and brandished a gun, police say.

While detectives continued to interview witnesses and collect evidence yesterday, friends and relatives mourned the dead.

Many gathered outside the two-story brown triplex, and by midmorning a 6-foot-high cross had been erected. Roses and pots of chrysanthemums and tiny orange flowers covered weeds.

Balloons tugged at their strings.

Someone squeezed the stems of three red carnations into the window of Coleman's white Cadillac, parked at the curb just yards away.

Later in the day, a cousin of the dead child, Gil Goins, drove up in a church van bringing more pots and still another balloon.

"Just doing what we can. This is a big family," he said. He was looking for answers and trying to stay busy. "If you have love in your heart, you also have forgiveness," he said. "My heart goes out to (Jackson's) family. Something was definitely wrong with the guy."

On Monday night, relatives of the dead toddler had lashed out at police, accusing them of firing the fatal bullets in a shootout with Jackson that killed the boy. But yesterday, police said they never fired into the house, and relatives apologized after viewing TreVieon's body and finding no bullet wounds.

"He was just beaten really bad, strangled and stabbed," said Millie Smith, the toddler's great aunt. "He was hard to identify."

The senselessness of the acts left Mary Ann Mitchell with similar feelings of defeat.

Coleman was "like family," she said. "He called me 'Mom.' He was close to my son. I grew up with his dad."

Like his friend, Jackson, Coleman had his own troubled past.

At 17, he was charged with unlawful possession of a firearm. The charge was later dropped in a sentencing agreement when he stayed out of trouble for a year. But last year, he was in trouble again, receiving a drug conviction that drew him a one year prison sentence.

The violence that took Coleman's life angered Mitchell.

"I'm so tired of it, just tired of it," she said. "People need to respect each other. This fighting has to stop. I don't know what, but something has to be done. It's crazy."

Police yesterday gave this account of how that violence erupted:

Dispatchers initially received 911 calls at 7:14 p.m., and although no one spoke, they heard gunfire in the background.

Officers were on the scene two minutes later, finding Jackson standing atop the home's balcony with the gun in his hand.

"He sees the officers, and he's pointing his weapon at the officers," Assistant Chief John Diaz said.

Learning from neighbors that children were inside, police quickly contained the area and called in hostage negotiators and a SWAT team.

"The order was given not to shoot at the suspect because it was known children were in the apartment," Diaz said.

At 7:34 p.m., Jackson reappeared on the balcony, and began "dry-firing" at police - squeezing the trigger several times without the gun going off. The gun had either jammed or wasn't loaded, and Jackson then went back inside, where "officers could see it looked like he was reloading the weapon," Diaz said.

Six minutes later, Jackson jumped from the balcony and started running toward the intersection at 51st Avenue South and South Fletcher Street. There, he suddenly spun around and leveled his gun at pursuing officers, police said. That's when three officers fired at least eight rounds, and Jackson fell in the street.

Kerlikowske did not identify the officers who fired, saying two were white, one was black and none had previously been involved in a shooting. The officers have 25, 12 and seven years on the force.

Struck by multiple gunshots, including one in the chest, he died following surgery at Harborview shortly after early yesterday, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Next door neighbor Mary Delora, 13, said yesterday she heard the shouting, heard Jackson's threats, and saw him fall to police gunfire in the street in front of her house.

"He was screaming 'Shut the kid up or I'll kill him,'" she said.

At Harborview, family members were heartened to see SamunIQUE Wilson recovering. The 6-year-old still was responsive to relatives, but has not told that her playmate TreVieon and her uncle Devon were dead.

"My poor baby's going to need a lot of mental help," said Cecilia Mayo, SamunIQUE's mother. Police say they recovered an unloaded .45-caliber revolver from Jackson's hand, which homicide Detective Gene Ramirez matched shell casings found in Coleman's apartment. Investigators are waiting for results from ballistics tests to confirm that the bullets that killed Coleman were fired from Jackson's gun, police said.

Jackson had long been known to have a taste for booze and drugs, court records show. He spent much of the last three years in juvenile detention, jail or substance abuse treatment. Although he was not yet 21, he had at least two aliases.

He's been arrested and accused of drug offenses, misdemeanor assault and drunken driving among other offenses.

Kerlikowske added yesterday that Jackson also had at least one firearm conviction.

A court drug and alcohol evaluation labeled him a "middle-stage alcoholic," court records say, and a sheriff's deputy who once arrested Jackson for driving drunk wrote in the report: "He had the appearance of a classic, very high alcohol content, out-of-control drunk."

But yesterday, family members insisted Jackson was not violent and is no killer.

"That's not Devon's character," said his uncle, James Haines, of Ballard. "The last people he could hurt is his family."

Haines said the rest of Jackson's family do not believe initial police accounts of the incident. They believe Jackson may have heard the children cry for help and had been chasing an assailant away from the house when police shot him. Jackson's wife, Antoinette, 26, also defended him.

"When my niece wakes up, I know it will all boil down that he didn't do it," she said.

P-I reporters Gordy Holt, Scott Sunde, Vanessa Ho, Candace Heckman and Greg Roberts contributed to this report.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

7:14 p.m.: Initial 911 call made; dispatcher hears gunshot. Call-backs to residence go unanswered.

7:16: First officers arrive, hear shots being fired.

7:17: Officers report hearing more shots; male victim reported to be injured in Apartment B.

7:19: Suspect on second-floor balcony with gun; runs inside apartment.

7:21: Ambulance dispatched to scene.

7:22: Containment of area established by police; hostage negotiators, SWAT team en route. Suspect returns to balcony, points gun at officers, steps back in apartment.

7:24: Officers begin evacuating neighborhood.

7:34: Suspect returns to balcony, aims and "fires" at officers, but without any bullets in the gun.

7:35: Suspect returns to living room, appears to load gun.

7:38: Negotiators arrive.

7:39: Suspect jumps off balcony with gun and attempts to flee.

7:40: Officer reports suspect has been shot.

Caption:

(1) PAUL JOSEPH BROWN/P-I: Amelia Edmon, grandmother of 23-month-old TreVieon Spruel, stands beside a memorial of flowers and balloons outside the apartment where the toddler died.

(2) GILBERT W. ARIAS/P-I: Shayla Smith, center, girlfriend of slain Donte Coleman, 20, is comforted by her friend Shannon Horton

(3) Spruel

(4) Timeline of events

Color Photo & Map

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