

NM State Police investigating fatal shooting by Gallup Police Department

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
Friday, 29 July 2016 04:36



NMSP, GPD not releasing much detail in shooting death

When officers are involved in a shooting, they are typically placed on administrative leave – whether the reported suspect survived his wounds or died.

Officials at the Gallup Police Department confirmed through a press release that the unnamed officers who were involved with the shooting death of Gallup resident Alvin Sylversmythe, on July 24, were placed on leave with pay.

But the release did not confirm how many officers were placed on leave or their names.

The release states that officers were dispatched to 304 Arnold Street at 12:45 am.

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“... Officers took steps to disarm the male to include the deployment of less than lethal devices,” the release states.

At the Arnold Street shooting scene, Lt. Rosanne Morrisette said the case would be handed over to NMSP to avoid bias.

“We are referring questions on the matter to the New Mexico State Police,” GPD Captain Marinda Spencer told the Sun this week. “I cannot tell you anything else.”

Sgt. Chad Pierce, spokesman for the state police, confirmed the case is in their hands. He stated in a press release that Sylversmythe, 29, was wielding two knives. Shots were fired, and Sylversmythe was taken to Gallup Indian Medical Center where he was pronounced dead.

As for the officers placed on administrative leave, “their names will not be released until interviews have been conducted,” Pierce noted.

What led up to the shooting? – Details murky

Sources have told the Sun that Sylversmythe was a Native American man, and had visited some acquaintances in an apartment complex. He may have even sat down to play some poker that evening. Additionally, the sources said that he suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Shaky Assertions? Unreliable sources? Perhaps. But little is known about Sylversmythe and what reportedly drove him to charge at officers with knives. The Sun reached out to an immediate family member, who declined to comment while police investigate the case.

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Why the public records silence?

It's apparent that the GPD doesn't want to release any information on Sylversmythe – even his prior arrest reports.

Front desk clerks were quick to defer comments on the shooting to state police before Gallup Sun reporters could ask any questions July 27. When asked about the status of a written request for copies of Sylversmythe's prior arrests, a clerk replied that the department has 10 days to respond to a request for records.

The following day, another clerk said that Sylversmythe's past records are part of the investigation and can't be released to the public.

A request for clarification was emailed to Pierce on July 28, to find out whether this directive was given to GPD, but no response was received as of press time.

But not everything can be kept a secret. Sylversmythe indeed has some past run-ins with the law.

According to New Mexico Courts website, in January, he was charged for residential burglary, larceny, and criminal damage to the property of a household member. The court's registration of activity list shows a "waiver of time limits" was the last update filed on the case June 29.

Additionally, in February of 2012, he was charged for aggravated battery against a household member. The case was dismissed without prejudice. Other past court appearances involved vehicular-oriented violations and civil matters.

Meanwhile, GPD Capt. Spencer said this is the first shooting death since 2004, when suspect

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Robert Kiro killed Corporal Larry Brian Mitchell in the midst of a standoff.

Babette Herrmann contributed to this report.

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