

Louisiana sheriff's deputies kill husband, wife in domestic dispute

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Family members of a husband and wife killed by sheriff's officers outside New Orleans have filed a lawsuit claiming the couple was shot even though they posed no danger. In August 2012, St. John the Baptist Parish sheriff's deputies responding to a domestic dispute shot and killed both parties. A witness to the scene claimed that they were shot without provocation and that one of them had been unarmed at the time. Officers allegedly planted a weapon on one of the bodies, made false reports, and destroyed evidence.

Patricia Doyle filed a lawsuit against sheriff's officers on August 26 on behalf of her granddaughters, as well as her deceased daughter and son-in-law. Doyle had reportedly called 911 last year in the middle of a domestic dispute between her daughter, Deborah Prine, and son-in-law, Robert Prine. She told the operator that Deborah Prine was armed and would try to get responding deputies to shoot her, but she would not hurt anyone. Doyle asked to make sure responding officers did not harm her daughter.

Instead, according to Patricia Doyle's complaint, 14 officers appeared on the scene and immediately began taking defensive positions. Deborah Prine left the house with a rifle strapped to her shoulder and walked to the end of the driveway. Her rifle remained uncocked and facing upward throughout the series of events. At no point did she reach for the rifle or point it at any of the officers. She did not fire the weapon at any time.

Officers ordered Prine to put down her weapon. Doyle pleaded with the officers not to shoot her daughter. The officers did not give Prine enough time to respond to the order. Mere seconds after issuing the order, officers shot Prine and she fell to the ground. The rifle dropped from her shoulder and the shock incurred from the fall caused it to discharge.

Prine, having been separated from her rifle, was now

unarmed and defenseless on the ground. At no point did she reach for the rifle. Officers then fired a second round of shots into her. At this point, Robert Prine ran up to his wife's body, screaming. He was likewise unarmed. Officers shot and killed him.

Heather and Karen Prine, the daughters of Robert and Deborah Prine, were on the phone with Doyle during the shootings. They heard Doyle pleading with the officers and then gunfire.

Officers then allegedly planted a knife and fork on Robert Prine's body and claimed that he had been armed at the time of the shooting. They claimed that Deborah Prine had cocked her rifle and pointed it at deputies. Additional claims were made that Robert Prine had hit Doyle and threatened to stab her, that Robert and Deborah Prine struggled for control of the rifle, and, finally, that immediately after Deborah was shot, Robert Prine had run toward officers brandishing a knife and fork threatening to stab them. The officers also allegedly destroyed evidence, including various witness testimonies.

The details of this case are similar to a lawsuit filed less than two weeks earlier. The son of Barbara Lassere, a 60-year-old LaPlace woman who was shot by a St. John the Baptist sheriff's deputy, filed a lawsuit on August 14th.

According to police reports, Lassere had been pulled over in LaPlace for a headlight-related traffic violation when she refused to get out of the car and brandished a pistol at an officer. She then fled the scene, resulting in a low-speed chase ending at a nearby local residence. She then again refused to get out of the car and allegedly fired a shot at the deputy. The deputy then returned fire and shot her through the chest.

Lassere's relatives claim, however, that neither she nor anyone else in the family had ever owned a firearm.

Relatives also claimed that Lassere was “terrified” of police and to them it seemed highly unlikely she would behave in such a violent manner toward them.

The response by the sheriff’s office was characterized by a heavy-handed display of brute force. Officers arrived at the scene with multiple squad cars, police dogs, and even riot gear. Lassere was given numerous conflicting and shouted demands. She was told at the same time, for example, to put her hands on the steering wheel and to put her hands outside the driver’s side window in the air.

Lassere’s niece, Angela Moore, was at the house at the time of the shooting. She claimed she heard four shots and saw a “policeman with a big gun in his hands” who told her to go next door. The pistol that Lassere allegedly brandished at officers was recovered at the scene, although some relatives claim it did not belong to her. Since Moore was forced to leave the scene, there are no witnesses to verify whose pistol it was.

One need not look too far into the past to see other blatant examples of corruption, brutality and even murder within the police apparatus in Louisiana. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) officers shot and killed unarmed residents on numerous occasions.

In one instance, a rookie NOPD officer shot an unarmed man named Henry Glover with a non-issue assault rifle in a strip-mall parking lot. Glover, a father of four, had been searching for fuel and water during the first few days following the hurricane. A few months before, NOPD officers had opened fire on a large group of residents on the Danziger Bridge. The shots wounded four residents and killed two, including a 17-year-old.



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