

Police gun down 93-year-old woman in central Texas city

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A police officer fatally shot 93-year-old Pearlie Golden at her home in Central Texas on May 6. Officer Stephen Stem, who fired the fatal shots, was dismissed from the Hearne Police Department on Saturday after the city council voted to take disciplinary action against him.

Golden's great nephew Roy Jones called 911 on the day of the shooting after his great aunt became agitated over not having her license renewed. Jones and Golden got into an argument when he refused to give her the keys to her car. At that point Golden reportedly grabbed a gun that had belonged to her late husband.

Jones hoped that police, with training in defusing such situations, could calm her down.

Instead, the arrival of police ended in the violent death of the elderly woman. The shooting is the latest in an epidemic of fatal police shootings in cities and towns, big and small, across the US.

When police arrived on the scene, Golden, affectionately known in the neighborhood as Miss Sully, was reportedly waving her gun in front of her home. The Hearne Police Department said in a written statement that Golden "brandished a firearm" when Stem arrived. Witnesses said that the responding officer, Stephen Stem, shot at Golden multiple times after she refused to put the gun down.

The *Eagle* of Bryan-College Station, Texas, reported May 10 that Golden fired two shots into the ground before being fatally shot by Stem. She was taken to a hospital in nearby Bryan, when she died from her injuries. An autopsy showed that two of the shots fired by Stem ultimately proved fatal.

Lawanda Cooke told KBTX, "Even if she did have a gun, she is in her 90s. They could have shot in the air to scare her. Maybe she would have dropped it. I don't see her shooting anyone."

The fatal shooting was the second by Officer Stem in less than two years. Not long after joining the Hearne Police Department, Stem shot and killed a man that police said was shooting a gun from a car in an apartment parking lot. Stem was later cleared of any wrongdoing in that case.

The shooting of Pearlie Golden has provoked outrage in the small city of Hearne, located in the center of the "Texas Triangle" of Dallas, Fort Worth and San Antonio. The city is surrounded by cotton farms and railways. As of the 2000 US Census, median income for a household in Hearne was \$19,556, and 31 percent of the population were living below the poverty line, including 45 percent of those under age 18 and 25 percent of those age 65 and older.

In the wake of Pearlie Golden's shooting, about 150 people marched to the city police station on Thursday to demand the officer be fired. William Foster III, a longtime resident of Hearne who organized the protest, told the demonstrators, "We can't just keep sitting around accepting what's going on with this town. It's time for a change."

Hearne Mayor Ruben Gomez also addressed the protest in an effort to defuse the anger of residents, saying he would recommend to an emergency city council meeting on Saturday that Stem be fired. "It's a loss of confidence in the community," Gomez said. "We can't have an officer the citizens have lost confidence in."

The Hearne City Council voted 6-0 on Saturday to take disciplinary against Stem, and the Hearne Police Department dismissed him from duty. Following the shooting, the Hearne Police Department had put Stem on paid administrative leave, which is standard procedure in police shootings in the city. An investigation into the shooting has been turned over to

the Texas Rangers, the state police force.

Eventually the case will be presented to a grand jury. Hearne City Attorney Bryan Russ Jr., commented, “I would expect people to be upset about this, a young officer shooting a 93-year-old lady.” He added, “I’m upset about it. Most of our citizens are upset, but at the same time I don’t believe all the facts have come to the surface yet.”

In an attempt to justify the gunning down of the 93-year-old, Russ stated, “She did have a gun... Now what she was doing with it, that is the ultimate question.”

The shooting of Pearlie Golden follows the fatal police shooting of Armand Martin, a 50-year-old veteran, on his front porch in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on May 3. Martin’s killing brought to 25 the number of fatal shootings by the Albuquerque Police Department since 2010. The string of shootings has provoked anger among city residents demanding an end to the police violence and that the police be held accountable.

On April 27, police in Long Beach, California, shot and killed Jason Conoscenti as he was fleeing, unarmed, down a flight of stairs. The incident was captured on video, which clearly showed that the 36-year-old’s hands were visibly empty and he posed no threat to police.

Robert Cameron Rudus, 23, a college student in San Antonio, Texas, was gunned down by campus police during what appeared to be a fairly routine traffic stop on a rainy night last December 6. An autopsy revealed he was shot five times, including once in the back.

One or two people fall victim to lethal police shootings every day in America. Police departments are being deliberately built up and militarized, as brutality against the population is encouraged. The US ruling elite is well aware of the anger growing in the working class over its policies of austerity, inequality and war, and is utilizing police violence to prepare for the inevitable resistance these policies will inevitably provoke.



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