

# Three killed in Stockton, California after police open fire on vehicle

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18 July 2014

Three people were killed Wednesday after dozens of police gave chase to bank robbery suspects on the highways north of Stockton, California. The suspects' vehicle was found riddled with bullets after enduring a constant barrage from police for over one hour. Included amongst those killed by police are two of the three suspects and a hostage, Misty Holt-Singh. Two additional female hostages were shot during the course of the chase and are expected to live.

The incident began around two p.m. when three men entered a Bank of the West branch on Thornton Road and allegedly attempted to rob the bank. The men took two employees and a customer hostage and escaped in one of the hostage's vehicles. Over a dozen police cars gave chase as the car traveled through Stockton, Lodi and Acampo before returning to the streets of residential Stockton. An unconscious 19-year-old suspect was found at the scene and transported to San Joaquin County Jail.

A spokesman for the Stockton Police Department told the press that "multiple shots" were fired from the escaping vehicle. "In my 18 years here I've never seen this level of violence," said Officer Joe Silva, adding that "there was just a complete disregard for human life."

Though Officer Silva's remarks were aimed at the fleeing suspects, they aptly describe the actions of the Stockton police, whose disregard for human life found expression at each stage in the chase.

Police initiated a high-speed chase of a vehicle that they knew contained just as many hostages as suspects. The fact that innocent hostages would almost definitely be hurt or killed in a shootout did not deter the police from effectively laying siege to the vehicle.

Police chased the suspects through three cities, firing on the vehicle with assault rifles and handguns even as

the vehicle drove through Stockton's residential neighborhoods in broad daylight during the summer months, when many of the city's children are at home.

Furthermore, police did not hold fire as the suspects finally exited the vehicle with a hostage in tow. The hostage, Holt-Singh, was killed in a rain of police bullets despite the fact that she had nothing to do with the alleged robbery; she had left her young son in the car when she went into the bank to make a transaction earlier that afternoon.

The Stockton Police Department claims that the officers' assault was justified by the "multiple shots" fired by the escaping suspects. Even if police were being fired on by the suspects, however, the alleged "threat to officer safety" was caused by the officers' decision to engage the vehicle in hot pursuit. No injuries would have occurred had police tracked the suspects at a distance or contacted the suspects for hostage negotiations.

Moreover, the extent to which the over fourteen carloads of police in bulletproof vehicles and Teflon vests were truly in danger is not clear, especially considering the fact that police from different jurisdictions were closing in on the getaway vehicle from multiple directions. Photographs taken at the conclusion of the chase also show that the Stockton Police Department used a tank-like armored vehicle as part of their assault on the fleeing vehicle. No officer was hurt during the chase.

The fatal conclusion to the chase is the product of the ongoing militarization of local police forces in the United States. Throughout the country, the deadly equipment and forceful tactics used by police against the population bear increasingly close resemblance to those used by Blackwater mercenaries in Fallujah.

The connection between the United States' brutal

wars abroad and the repression of the population domestically is not purely theoretical—local police are increasingly making use of the “leftover” military equipment from the imperialist wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A *New York Times* report published in June detailed the Obama administration’s transfer of heavy weaponry from the military to local police. According to the report, this transfer includes 93,763 machine guns, 180,718 magazine cartridges, grenade launchers, silencers, 533 airplanes and helicopters, 432 armored “Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected” (MRAP) vehicles, and over 44,900 pieces of night vision equipment.

The physical militarization of police equipment and methods are taking place alongside and in direct connection to the attack on the democratic rights of the population. Police increasingly make use of “no-knock” warrants that allow them to make armed, unannounced raids into the homes of suspects, despite the Fourth Amendment’s proscription of “unreasonable searches and seizures,” and almost nine in ten police departments now operate a “police paramilitary unit” to oversee military-type police operations.

The militarization of local police forces in the United States is inseparably bound up with the increase in social inequality and the ruling class’s preparations for the outbreak of opposition to its policies of social counterrevolution. Those killed Wednesday by the Stockton police are the latest names to be added to the growing list of casualties of police violence in the United States.



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