Criminal investigation launched into police killing of unarmed man in London

Robert Stevens
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The shooting death by a police firearms officer of father-of-two, Jermaine Baker, on December 11, has provoked an angry response within the north London area of Tottenham.

Baker, 28, died from a single gunshot wound at 9:39 a.m. during what police say was an attempt to free two convicts from a prison van in Wood Green in north London. According to the Metropolitan Police, Baker was in a parked car when he was killed.

At least one eyewitness account claims that Baker had nothing to do with any such attempt to spring the convicts. Darren Henry said in the course of an angry December 18 meeting at Tottenham Town Hall, "The police officers murdered Jermaine. He was asleep when he was shot. There are witnesses who are afraid to step forward because of the witness intimidation in the Mark Duggan case."

According to the BBC, the meeting was called by the Metropolitan Police six days after the killing to "address community tensions."

Duggan, a 29-year-old father of six, was unarmed when he was shot twice in broad daylight, in Tottenham, by an armed police officer on August 4, 2011. His death was the spark for riots that began just two days later, which quickly spread across the country.

No-one was ever brought to justice for Duggan's killing. A travesty of justice was completed earlier this year when, after three-and-a-half years, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) produced a report exonerating the police of any wrongdoing or misconduct. This followed an inquest in January, which returned a perverse verdict that Duggan had been lawfully killed.

Immediately after Duggan's killing, the Metropolitan Police and the IPCC told a pack of lies about the circumstances in which the he was shot and killed, including the claim that that Duggan had opened fire on police first.

Given this context, nothing stated by the police or the IPCC, or the media regarding the killing of Baker should, at this stage, be taken at face value.

As news of Baker's death first emerged some newspapers immediately printed stories stating that he was a member of a gang or a "suspected gangster." However, according to a BBC report of the meeting cited above, "Haringey Borough [Metropolitan Police] Commander Victor Olisa said police did not believe Mr Baker was a gang member, as had been suggested in some newspapers."

In a highly unusual move, the IPCC has opened a "criminal, homicide investigation" into Baker's killing. Its representative at the meeting, IPCC commissioner Cindy Butts, said that the previous day a firearms officer had been arrested and questioned under caution over the fatal shooting of a man in north London. The officer involved has been suspended, with Butts stating, "All the other significant firearms officers have provided detailed statements…"

The anger in the local community at the police killing of yet another resident was palpable in a YouTube video, which captured part of a pre-prepared statement that Butts read out and the response to it. She said, "On Friday 11 December, Jermaine Baker, a 28-year-old man of mixed race, from Tottenham, died during a police operation in Bracknell Close, Wood Green…"

At this point, several people in the audience shouted out "murder" and "murderers" and "shame on you." She continued, "Mr Baker received medical treatment at the scene but sadly died as the result of a single gunshot wound."

Butts presented a number of what she said were "facts" as she gave a version of events to the meeting.

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She continued, “At the scene was a black Audi. The evidence suggests that Mr Baker was in this car when he was shot. In that car was what appears to be a non-police issue firearm.

“Further forensic examinations will take place on the non-police issue firearm and the firearm that was discharged by the police officer.

“I am not able to provide information about whereabouts in the car the non-police issue firearm was found or where Mr Baker was sat. These questions are the focus of our investigation.”

She stated, “A CCTV trawl has been undertaken and at this stage no relevant CCTV has been identified. No body-worn cameras have captured the incident.”

Butts was again interrupted at this stage with audience members loudly expressing their anger. One man shouted out, “They weren’t wearing them!” Following the outrage over Duggan’s killing the Met announced in 2014 that police firearms officers would wear audio visual equipment to record their operations.

Butts concluded by saying that the IPCC’s decision to launch a “criminal, homicide investigation” was not one “we took lightly.” She had already told those present, “The evidence we have at this stage does not mean that the officer definitively committed a criminal act and nor does it mean he will necessarily be charged with a criminal offense.”

A reporter from media outlet Russia Today (RT) asked Assistant Commissioner Helen King if she had regrets over the death of Baker and whether the Met would be willing to make an apology. In response King said, “The Metropolitan Police regrets the fact that a young man from London, Jermaine Baker, is no longer with us.” A member of the crowd reportedly shouted “You liar!” in response.

Butts did not state whether the alleged “non-police issue firearm” was on Baker’s person, or even close to him. Butts also refused, when questioned, to disclose the grounds under which the firearms officer was arrested.

The Metropolitan Police moved swiftly to denounce the homicide investigation. Ken Marsh, chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation’s constables branch, said, “I’m very angry about what the IPCC are doing. Why do they need to suspend the officer now when we don’t have all the information in front of us? It’s just a case of the IPCC jumping up and down and hauling this officer over the coals before we know what’s happened. It’s wrong.”

The BBC reported further, “The Police Federation said it wanted to find out why the IPCC was ‘bandying words about’ like homicide.”

It reported Marsh stating, “I’ve never heard of that before. It’s a week before Christmas and this individual’s [the officer] life has been thrown into disarray.”

The police have also effectively confirmed that the officers involved in Baker’s death were not wearing body cameras by offering up an excuse as to why this was so. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe said, “What’s been a challenge for us is finding the right kit for officers who are covert. Of course what you don’t want is someone to be recognised as a police officer who is covertly on surveillance and armed, by someone seeing the camera… So that’s something that we’re still working on, and it could certainly account for what happened last week.”

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