

## **SCRIPT WASN'T FOLLOWED IN STANDOFF \ POLICE, GUNMAN DIED AFTER SPRINGLE MISCUES**

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The morning of Oct. 17 broke gray and crisp, and Detroit Police Lt. James Schmit and Officer Frank Walls began the last hours of their lives with different expectations.

For Schmit, new scenery. It was the first day of his new assignment at the 5th (Jefferson) Precinct on the lower east side.

For Walls, a new scenario. He was a member of the Special Response Team, a specially-trained and equipped hostage rescue unit. To SRT members, a felony arrest wasn't just an arrest. It was, to use SRT jargon, a scenario, a situation to be studied as a tactical exercise.

Schmit, 41, could not expect that his new scenery would fade so quickly outside the apartment of **Charles Knowles** .

Nor could Walls, 39, have expected that his final scenario would be acted out on the trash-covered living room floor of that same apartment just seconds before **Knowles** himself would die there.

This story of the three lives that came together and ended that day is based on interviews with police and civilian witnesses, Wayne County morgue reports and police reports and records.

By 7:30 a.m., the two officers were arriving for work -- Schmit at the precinct house on E. Jefferson that sits in the middle of the construction rubble for the Chrysler project; Walls at a former school near downtown that serves as the SRT base.

Meanwhile, **Knowles** , 50, was busily barricading himself inside his first-floor apartment at 4130 Springle, about a mile and a half from the precinct.

**Knowles** had suffered from paranoid schizophrenia for almost 20 years. He'd had problems with both police and the thugs who do business in the eroding east side neighborhood near Mack and Conner. One of his cars had recently been stolen, and **Knowles** became so uncontrollably upset about it that he was arrested.

While he was being held by police, his apartment was burglarized.

After being released, **Knowles** chained his five remaining cars together in front of his building. And he grew reluctant to leave the relative safety of his first-floor apartment.

But sometime on the night of Oct. 16, **Knowles** ventured out and was beaten and robbed on Springle, near his apartment.

The next morning, **Knowles** was up long before dawn, and he was seething with anger.

About 6:45 a.m., other residents of the building were awakened by **Knowles**. He was kicking doors and breaking open mailboxes. He pushed a woman out the building's front door. It locked behind her and he stood there, refusing to let her back in.

**Knowles** refused to allow another resident, a man, into the building, telling him: "You're the person I heard preaching on the radio this morning."

Another woman who lived in the building watched as **Knowles** walked to the basement and began pouring gasoline on the floor.

Otis Knott, 29, the building manager, called 911.

The report crackled out over police radios: "Man pouring gas around building and armed with gun threatening tenants inside."

Officers **Charles** Rogers and **Charles** Rice of the 5th Precinct were first to arrive, pulling up outside the building at 7:40 a.m. Knott met them and said **Knowles** was inside Apartment No. 2 and he had a gun.

The two officers went inside. Rogers knocked on the door. **Knowles** answered by yelling obscenities and then telling the officers: "Better get away from the door!"

Rogers twisted the knob and the door opened three or four inches until it was stopped by a safety chain. Rogers could see **Knowles** inside. He was wandering through the living room, dragging a rifle by the barrel and holding a red plastic gas can in his other hand.

Rogers and Rice made repeated attempts to convince **Knowles** to put the rifle down and open the door. Rice recalled that **Knowles**' "conversation never made any sense. He kept repeating the same thing."

The officers called for help.

A second scout car arrived from the precinct, followed by 5th Precinct Inspector George Ruhana. Schmit was with him.

Ruhana ordered the apartment building evacuated, told officers to put on bulletproof vests and radioed for a fire truck. Schmit drew up a rough sketch of the perimeter and deployed officers to keep away civilians, especially children on their way to school.

Ruhana also radioed for a hostage negotiator and a sniper team from the Tactical Services Section. The snipers and Sgt. Victor Hess, a TSS negotiator, arrived.

As Hess began trying to communicate with **Knowles**, the snipers set up in a building across the street and other backup units began flooding the neighborhood. A fire truck arrived.

**Knowles** was offered food, cigarets, liquor and a minister. No response.

Ruhana asked for a bolt cutter from the fire engine.

Hess slid a specially designed mirror through the cracked open door, trying to get a better look at what **Knowles** was doing. **Knowles** could now be heard babbling about the large crowd congregating outside his window (none was), then fast forwarding to talk of a fishing trip. He pushed furniture and his microwave in front of the door.

Using a pry bar, Hess forced the door open again until the chain caught. He slipped a mirror handle through the hinge side of the door to keep it open. Officer Harold Rochon of the 5th Precinct moved into position with the bolt cutters to try to snip the chain.

It was then that **Knowles** yelled his only intelligible statement of the siege: "I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't do that."

As the officers backed off, **Knowles** pushed the mirror handle out and slammed the door.

At 9:40 a.m., Commander Billie Willis of the 5th Precinct, who had arrived and taken charge, gave an order to force the door open.

Rochon again pried it open as far as the chain would allow, then began kicking the knob side of the door as Hess furiously went to work with the pry bar on the hinges. Schmit, who despite orders was not wearing a bulletproof vest, ran up and kicked at the center of the door. Rochon, seeing **Knowles** raise the rifle, yelled:

"Stand clear! Stand clear! He's got the gun pointed! Stand clear!"

Ruhana grabbed at Schmit, but it was too late. **Knowles** fired one shot through the door.

The bullet, which blew wood fragments into Ruhana's thigh, cheek and right eye, slammed through the left side of Schmit's chest, damaging his diaphragm, spleen, left kidney, intestines, ribs and back muscles.

Officers, some stumbling over one another while trying to help, dragged Schmit out of the building, put him into the back seat of a scout car and raced to Samaritan Health Center, where he died at 3:52 p.m.

After being informed an "officer is down," Executive Deputy Police Chief James Bannon, Deputy Chief James Younger and several other department command officers went to the scene.

Bannon, who was in charge overall, had Younger take command of the inner perimeter, and a mobile command post was set up at Mack and Springle.

By 10:30 a.m., Younger was ordering more sniper teams into other buildings across the street

and having detectives from the Repeat Offenders Unit background **Knowles** .

Younger also called for the Special Response Team, the relatively new unit of officers highly trained in negotiation, long-range sniping, stealth entries, hostage rescue and specialized weapons.

Some SRT officers drove the new police armored personnel carrier vehicle -- more commonly called the tank -- to the scene. They were told to pull to the front of the building, knock out **Knowles** ' front windows and fire in tear gas.

Suddenly, orders changed. The SRT members were ordered back to their base and the tank was ordered back to its garage. Then orders changed again, and the SRT team and the tank arrived back at the scene about 1:15 p.m.

Some detectives, meanwhile, had located **Knowles** ' relatives, including a sister, brother and a daughter, and driven them to Springle so they could try convincing **Knowles** to surrender. None were successful.

Two other detectives tracked down Dr. Richard Morin, one of **Knowles** ' psychiatrists at Samaritan Hospital. Morin told them **Knowles** had a long history of paranoid schizophrenia and usually did not take his medication to control his hallucinations and delusions.

Morin would not go to the scene and other doctors who had treated **Knowles** were not available.

After deciding to assault the apartment, Bannon, Younger and other command officers discussed which unit -- SRT or TSS -- should handle the situation. Younger called for SRT and Bannon did not object.

A plan was formulated, but it was not consistent with SRT training that stressed moving slowly, methodically, precisely. Haste makes death, the unit had been taught.

There was little information about the inside layout of **Knowles** ' apartment. Hess of TSS drew a basic sketch of what he had managed to see.

About 1:45 p.m., the Alpha entry team -- including Frank Walls and headed by Sgt. Ted Montgomery -- and other SRT officers gathered at the rear of the building for a final briefing.

There was a weapons check: German-made MP5 9mm carbines and P7 9mm semiautomatic handguns, backup revolvers, commando knives, flak vests, tear-gas grenades, stun (flash-bang) grenades and "body bunker" bulletproof body shields.

Worried about possible injury to civilians or other officers, Bannon and Younger decided not to have the SRT members use their MP5s, which can be fired single shot or as a machine gun.

For Alpha members, this was a hitch. Power had been cut to the building. The apartment was dark, and the MP5s have flashlights attached.

The SRT members also were told to use their secondary weapons, the handguns, which bothered some of them because they recently had been returned after repairs at the factory and had not been field-tested.

Walls was not carrying a P7 handgun. When they were handed out, he refused one because it had not been field-tested. He had opted for his personal 9mm handgun.

The black-clad SRT members began moving into position. Alpha Team crept silently down the hallway toward **Knowles** ' apartment, followed by Younger and Lt. Spurgeon Dotson, SRT's commanding officer.

Suddenly, a voice crackled on a police radio being carried by one of the command officers at the end of the hallway. **Knowles** immediately fired a shot through the wall at the sound. He now knew somebody was outside his door.

At 2:10 p.m., the assault began.

The tank rolled up to the front window and an officer in the vehicle fired tear gas into the living room. **Knowles** , who was seen briefly in the northwest corner of the apartment by a sniper, fired a shot out the front window at the tank. The tear gas had been in the apartment less than five minutes when Younger gave the SRT team the order to break down the door.

From outside, another SRT member broke the window to **Knowles** ' kitchen and pitched in a gas grenade and a stun grenade.

Because no battering ram was available, Walls braced the body shield in front of himself and slammed into the door. He backed up and slammed into it again and then repeated the maneuver. The door caved in the third time and a second stun grenade was lobbed in.

"Go! Go! Go," barked a command officer.

Walls moved quickly into the apartment, but he could see little. He was wearing a gas mask and looking through a small plexiglass window in his shield into a darkened apartment that was filling with tear gas.

Walls turned left to face the northwest corner of the living room. As he did so, **Knowles** , who had run 13 feet to the bathroom and dropped into the rubble on the floor, fired a shot from his lever-action .35-caliber rifle.

The high-powered slug ripped into Walls' right side, in between the heavy protective plates of his vest, piercing bullet-resistant material that holds the vest together.

"I'm hit! I'm hit!" Walls yelled, spinning and firing two shots from his handgun in the direction of **Knowles** . Then he dropped his shield and slumped onto a mattress in the living room.

Officer Emery Esse, who moved in directly behind Walls, spun and fired a barrage of shots into the darkness at his right. As he ducked behind a wall, **Knowles** fired another shot before Esse, again firing instinctively, unleashed more shots toward **Knowles** .

"We need more firepower! Light! Light! We need light!" Esse yelled.

Montgomery, moving in behind Esse, fired two shots toward **Knowles** and then bathed the living room with his flashlight as other officers moved in to cover **Knowles** , who lay dying on the floor.

Walls quickly was carried outside and officers tore off his vest in a futile attempt to find the fatal wound and stop the bleeding. He was loaded into an EMS truck and rushed to St. John Hospital, where he died at 2:34 p.m.

As Walls was rushed out of the building, Younger stood outside, where he was told that **Knowles** was dead. Hearing that, he flashed a sign of success.

Thumbs up.

#### HOW LT. SCHMIT DIED

9:00 a.m.

Officers talk to **Knowles** , trying to keep door ajar with pry bar.

9:35 a.m.

Inspector Ruhana orders Lt. Schmit out of the hallway until he gets on a bullet-resistant vest

9:40 a.m.

With decision to assault, Schmit runs up to assist Sgt. Hess and Officer Rochon in battering door.

9:41 a.m.

Rochon sees **Knowles** aiming rifle and warns others; they try to pull Schmit away, but bullet hits him.

#### HOW OFFICER WALLS DIED

10:30 a.m.

Special Response Team Alpha, of which Walls was a member, arrives at 4130 Springle.

11:15 a.m.

SRT Alpha is ordered to return to its base and does so.

1:15 p.m.

SRT Alpha returns to Springle Street.

2:00 p.m.

Tear gas projectiles are fired into the apartment from the armored tank in front. At pre-arranged signals, a member of another SRT tosses a tear gas grenade and a flash-bang stun grenade through the kitchen window on the side of the building.

2:05 p.m.

Walls and his partner, Officer Esse, are stationed at the door to **Knowles** ' apartment. On the order, Walls breaks the door down by slamming his bullet-resistant body shield into it three times.

2:05:25 p.m.

Walls, followed by Esse, charges into apartment and faces corner where **Knowles** was last seen. But **Knowles** had moved to bathroom floor, and shoots Walls in the right side. Esse steps in and kills **Knowles** .

#### CUTLINE

James Younger

James Bannon

Billie Willis

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Caption: Photo; Diagram JOHN VAN PELT

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