

2 COPS, MENTALLY ILL MAN SLAIN \ BARRICADED RESIDENT POURED GAS IN BUILDING

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An east side Detroit man with a history of mental problems shot and killed two police officers Monday before he was slain by police who rushed his apartment after a seven-hour standoff.

Charles Knowles , 50, who had been hospitalized for mental illness at least six times since 1969, was pronounced dead on the floor of his bathroom shortly after 2 p.m., police said.

Knowles was killed after he shot Officer Frank Walls, a member of the special response team that burst into his apartment after tear gas was fired into the building.

About 9:30 a.m., **Knowles** had shot Lt. James Schmit of the 5th (Jefferson) Precinct when Schmit and other officers tried to force open his door.

Walls, who died almost immediately after being hit in the side, and Schmit, who died about 90 minutes after Walls, were the first two officers slain in the line of duty in Detroit this year. Four officers were killed in the line of duty last year.

"It's obviously a tragedy to lose two police officers in the line of duty. . . . And this is a very sad situation," said Mayor Coleman Young.

A police board of inquiry will convene to investigate the shooting. The preferred police response to such situations is to wait out the gunman.

Chief William Hart said police decided to rush **Knowles** ' apartment "after considering the fact that Mr. **Knowles** had poured gasoline throughout the apartment building, which may have ignited; children were about to be dismissed from schools in the area and, further, more than 25 families had been evacuated from their homes."

Knowles ' brother, Shelby **Knowles** , 36, of Detroit, questioned the police tactics.

"If police would have just put away their guns and waited, he would have been OK. He wouldn't have hurt nobody," **Knowles** said.

"I think they went after him because an officer got wounded. Cops brought this all on themselves."

Knowles had a 19-year history of mental illness and was diagnosed by psychiatrists as a paranoid schizophrenic, according to Wayne County Probate Court records.

Last March, **Knowles** was treated at Samaritan Health Center -- the same facility where Schmit died.

Knowles ' behavior has included covering everything in his apartment with aluminum foil, flooding the apartment with hot water and setting fire to another apartment building, according to the records.

A native of Tupelo, Miss., **Knowles** retired about five years ago as a nurse's aide at a Highland Park nursing home. He owned five cars that he kept chained together in front of the apartment house.

Friends and neighbors were well aware of **Knowles** ' mood swings.

"On his good days, he's very pleasant. One of the sweetest guys you ever want to know. Hell, he takes people to the grocery store on those days. Then he goes into all kinds of changes," said Otis Knott, 29, caretaker of the apartment building where **Knowles** lived.

Several weeks ago, Knott said, **Knowles** was in "one of his moods" and locked himself in his apartment until about 3 a.m.

"He went out, turned the blinkers on in his car and walked around (the car) with McDonald's cups around him like a necklace," Knott said. "That was usually the kind of stuff he did. Nothing violent."

It was Knott who made the call to police around 7:40 a.m. Monday that started **Knowles** , Walls and Schmit on a collision course that would end all three of their lives.

Knott told police **Knowles** had poured gasoline throughout his apartment and barricaded himself inside.

"This time it just took the cake. I had to call somebody," Knott said.

By 8:10 a.m., officers from the 5th Precinct began arriving at the two-story, brown-brick apartment building just south of the I-94 freeway and east of Conner. **Knowles** , who police said was babbling incoherently, was in his upstairs apartment.

About 9:30 a.m., after police had evacuated the building's 12 other tenants and set up a command post in an apartment across the hall from **Knowles** ' door, a contingent of officers went to his apartment. The officers knew **Knowles** had a high-powered rifle.

As Schmit, a patrol supervisor from the precinct, tried to force open the door, a bullet ripped through from inside, hitting Schmit, who was not wearing a bulletproof vest, in the chest. The bullet threw wood fragments into the face of Inspector George Ruhana, 42.

Fellow officers carried Schmit outside the building, where other officers were tripping over

police and medical equipment to rush to his aid. Schmit was rushed to Samaritan Health Center in the back seat of a scout car.

After firing the shot, **Knowles** stopped talking and police units began arriving in waves and evacuated the entire block.

About 1:45 p.m., with a drizzly rain falling, the police armored tank arrived with special response team members aboard. It lumbered to the rear of the apartment building, then trundled toward the front of the building and was stationed on the lawn. Three rounds of tear gas were fired into **Knowles** ' apartment. He responded with a single gunshot aimed at the tank.

About 2:05 p.m., an explosion of gunfire -- at least 15 shots -- rang from inside the building as special response team members rushed into **Knowles** ' apartment.

A police investigator who spoke with the team said Walls was the "point man" -- the first to enter. He was carrying a bullet- resistant "body bunker shield" with a glass eyeport.

Walls looked through the eyeport to a rubble-strewn area where **Knowles** was lying but, apparently because of smoke, didn't see him, the investigator said.

As Walls turned with the shield, exposing his side, **Knowles** raised his rifle and fired the fatal shot. Other police officers members returned fire immediately, killing **Knowles** .

Walls was dead on arrival at St. John Hospital at 3:24 p.m.

THE VICTIMS

LT. JAMES SCHMIT

* Age: 41

* Years of service: 20

* Assignment: patrol supervisor, 5th (Jefferson) Precinct; hit by a bullet fired through the door as he tried to force his way into **Charles Knowles** ' apartment

OFFICER FRANK WALLS

* Age: 39

* Years of service: 13

* Assignment: special response team; shot as he broke through the door of **Knowles** ' apartment

CHARLES KNOWLES

* Age: 50

* Background: retired nurse's aide; hospitalized for mental illness in the Detroit area six times since 1969, when he was first diagnosed a paranoid schizophrenic. Relatives said **Knowles** had been mugged and robbed early Monday, which may have triggered his rage. "We tried to get him to move out of here," said a niece, Yolanda **Knowles** , 19. "But when they beat him and jumped him, that just did it. . . ."

CUTLINE

An officer and an EMS worker rush a stretcher Monday to the east side apartment where a Detroit man held police at bay for seven hours, shooting two to death, before he was killed.

Officers move back against the building as the gunman fires a shot from his apartment.

An officer looks on as a Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office employe removes the body of **Charles Knowles** .

Caption: Photo Color JOHN COLLIER; Photo MELANIE STENGEL; Diagram and Map MOSES HARRIS and JOHN VAN PELT

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