



CITY OF LONG BEACH

POLICE DEPARTMENT

100 LONG BEACH BOULEVARD * LONG BEACH * CALIFORNIA 90802 * (562) 570-7301 * FAX (562) 570-7114

JEROME E. LANCE
CHIEF OF POLICE

HIGHLIGHTS OF REMARKS BY CHIEF LANCE

AT AUGUST 18TH NAACP MEETING

On Sunday, August 18, 2002, Long Beach Chief of Police Jerome Lance attended the monthly meeting of the Long Beach Chapter of the NAACP to provide information regarding the results of the investigations of the officer involved shooting that resulted in the death of Ms. Marcella Byrd. The following is a summary of the key points addressed by Chief Lance during his presentation:

SYNOPSIS OF INCIDENT

On Saturday, January 19th, 2002, at 11:02 a.m., the Long Beach Police Department received a 911 call from an employee at the Top Value Market reporting that a petty theft of a cart full of groceries had been stolen from the store. At 11:07 a.m., a second 911 call was received from a store employee stating that two customers had observed that the suspect, an African American woman, was holding an 8-inch knife in her hand and was walking away from the parking lot of the store onto 5th Street. The dispatcher immediately upgraded the call to a Priority 1 and advised the responding officers that the suspect was now armed.

At 11:08 a.m., the first officer located the suspect walking eastbound on 5th Street approaching Pine Avenue and requested additional officers to assist him at that location. The responding officer confronted the suspect and ordered her to stop and drop the knife, however, the suspect did not verbally respond to his commands and continued to walk towards the populated business district on Pine Avenue.

At 11:09, the officer noticed that the suspect appeared to be disturbed and requested that a supervisor respond to his location with a Less Lethal weapon. A sergeant arrived on scene less than a minute later. Also at 11:09 am, three additional officers arrived to provide assistance in disarming the suspect and stopping her from continuing into the business district and coming into contact with the pedestrians and shoppers in the area. Recognizing that knives can be lethal within a distance of up to 20 feet, the officers attempted to contain the suspect by establishing a 20-foot defensive perimeter. Additional commands were repeatedly given by the officers, but the suspect refused to acknowledge their instructions or talk to them in any way and continued walking towards the corner of 4th and Pine Avenue.

At 11:10 a.m., the sergeant fired one beanbag round from the Less Lethal weapon, striking the suspect in the legs, but failing to stop her. The sergeant struck the suspect with a second beanbag round, which also failed to stop her from continuing forward. The suspect was still armed and now appeared to be more upset. At 11:11 a.m., the suspect stepped towards the officers and raised her arm and the knife in an upward motion. Responding to the threat, the officers fired at the suspect. Paramedics transported the suspects to St. Mary Medical Center where she died from her injuries.

Responding to the threat, the officers fired at the suspect. Paramedics transported the suspects to St. Mary Medical Center where she died from her injuries.

INVESTIGATIVE RESULTS

Anytime there is an officer involved shooting that results in the loss of life of a member of the community, three separate and independent investigations are conducted – one by the Los Angeles County Coroner, one by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office and one by the Long Beach Police Department. The results of these investigations are summarized below:

The Coroner's investigation concluded that the cause of death was from gunshot wounds and confirmed the identity of the suspect to be Marcella Byrd, a resident of Long Beach.

The investigation conducted by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office determined "that the officers' use of lethal force was a justified act of self-defense and defense of others."

The Long Beach Police Department's investigation determined that the use of lethal force by the officers was in response to an immediate threat and a substantial risk to the community, and was in accordance with the training, policies and procedures of the department.

As a result of the investigations, we learned that Ms. Byrd suffered from mental illness. It was also determined that on the day of the shooting, Ms. Byrd had not taken her medication for several days.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS FROM CHIEF LANCE

- "It is a tragedy any time a person dies at the hand of another in our community, but especially when an incident involving a police officer results in a loss of life. It is tragic for the family of the victim, it is tragic for the community and it is tragic for the police officer or officers involved. I am truly sorry that Ms. Byrd lost her life. My deepest sympathy goes out to her family and friends."

- This incident would have been tragic regardless of the age, or gender of the suspect, but the fact that Ms. Byrd was a middle-aged woman, made it even more tragic. I know that many of you wonder how a group of armed police officers could possibly be intimidated or sufficiently threatened by someone like Ms. Byrd to resort to the use of deadly force.

The simple fact is that neither their weapons nor their bulletproof vests can stop an attack with a knife. Our officers had the duty and responsibility to protect the people on Pine Avenue from a knife-wielding suspect. They attempted to do that by impeding her progress south on Pine Avenue, by keeping the innocent bystanders away from the scene, and by repeatedly trying to get Ms. Byrd to talk to them, and to get her to stop and drop the knife."

- "The tragic death of Ms. Byrd underscored the critical issue of how to safely and effectively deal with mentally ill people on the street. That is a community problem, not just a police problem. We need support for more and better services to assist the mentally ill. We need places for persons with mental problems to go for help. We need help from

families to care for and monitor the behavior of their mentally ill family members. We need to collectively make sure that the individuals suffering with mental illness are allowed to lead as safe and as normal a life as possible, and that they do so without breaking the law or posing a threat to other members of our community.”

- Once again, I am truly sorry that Ms. Byrd lost her life on January 19th. I have sympathy for her family and her friends. I also have sympathy of the Long Beach Police Officers involved in this incident.

We want to work with you, the members of the community, to learn from this incident and move forward to improve the safety and quality of life for all people in Long Beach.”

###