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Dallas SWAT doctors save officer's life during raid

Right place, right time

By Steve Thompson and Tanya Eiserer
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DALLAS, Tex. — A Dallas police lieutenant shot in the neck during a Wednesday morning raid was expected to survive, thanks largely to two doctors on the SWAT team he led.

The doctors said they did not dwell on whether Lt. Carlton Marshall would live or die. Instead, they fell back on their training, mentally checking off what they knew must be done. Stop the bleeding. Get him oxygen.

But treating him was far from routine. He was also their friend.

"We care for sick patients in the emergency department every day," said Dr. Jeff Metzger, who with Dr. Alex Eastman is credited with saving the lieutenant's life. "But it's entirely different when it's someone you know, someone who you know their family."

Lt. Marshall, a father of three and 21-year veteran of the Dallas Police Department, staged the 6 a.m. raid as his agency assisted federal authorities in serving a warrant accusing a man of money laundering.

The target was Clayton Sharpless, 34, who lived at the north Oak Cliff home with a 19-year-old woman, her 4-month-old daughter and two teenagers who police say worked for Mr. Sharpless.

Things nearly turned deadly when the woman, Marisela Villa, fired a shot that hit the lieutenant as he and the SWAT team burst in, police say.

The SWAT team's plan was to enter the home's back bedroom and surprise Mr. Sharpless and Ms. Villa while they were sleeping, said Dallas police Sgt. Gary Kirkpatrick, who is leading the investigation into the shooting. He provided the following account:

The team members positioned themselves beside the small brick house, and 44-year-old Lt. Marshall stationed himself by one of the bedroom windows. He set off an explosive, noise-making "flashbang" device, intended to divert the attention of those inside and alert the team that it was time to go in.



[See Dallas SWAT in action on BLUtube](#) 

"Police, police!" the officers yelled.

They broke out a window, shined a light inside and yelled at the couple to put their hands up. Mr. Sharpless got up by the bed and put his hands up as ordered.

But Ms. Villa rolled off the other side of the bed to the floor, where the officers could not see her. At about the same moment, Lt. Marshall busted through a window almost right over her, and the shot rang out.

When police could see Ms. Villa again, she was holding her baby. It was not clear whether she had fired the shot while holding the baby or picked her up just afterward, Sgt. Kirkpatrick said. Police found a pistol on the floor where she had been.

"We feel certain that everyone in the house knew that the police were there and that she tried to kill a cop," Sgt. Kirkpatrick said.

'Officer down!'

As cries of "Officer down!" went out over police radios, the two SWAT team doctors headed toward the side of the house. Drs. Eastman and Metzger are physicians at Parkland Memorial Hospital and UT Southwestern Medical Center. They join the SWAT team on missions as often as several times a week.

Dr. Eastman, who has been with the program since it was created in 2004, was one of the first doctors in the nation to become a trained member of a SWAT team.

(AP Photo/Matt Slocum)

Seconds after Wednesday's gunshot, the doctors met SWAT team members dragging Lt. Marshall around toward the front of the house. The doctors crouched in the grass over the lieutenant.

Blood gushed from his neck and his airway was clogged; the doctors knew he could not get oxygen. Dr. Metzger held the lieutenant's head in his hands while Dr. Eastman cut a hole in his neck, allowing him to breathe.

"Hang in there; everything's going to be fine," they told Lt. Marshall. They said he couldn't speak, but they hoped he might hear them.



"L.T. is a great guy, very caring," Dr. Metzger said. "He's a great family man, just a great guy to be around."

Lt. Marshall was rushed to Methodist Dallas Medical Center in Oak Cliff for surgery. As paramedics were cleaning the ambulance later, they found the bullet that police believe injured him; it apparently had made its way out of his wounds.

For hours, his fellow officers were left to wonder if he would survive surgery. As the news spread, they arrived at the hospital to console one another. The Dallas City Council opened its meeting Wednesday with a prayer for him.

Colleagues say Lt. Marshall is a "hard-charging" police officer and a well-respected leader who leads by example and would never ask his officers to do anything he wouldn't do.

"You don't see many lieutenants like him; he still wants to be a troop," said Senior Cpl. Scott Eggleston, who has worked for Lt. Marshall.

"He is a supervisor that wants to be on the front line. He always wanted to be with the troops," said Dallas police Sgt. Roger Rudloff.

Lt. Marshall's wife is an Irving police officer, and his father is a former Dallas police officer.

Federal officials did not release details of the warrant to arrest Mr. Sharpless and to search his home in the 1100 block of Hollywood Avenue. Dallas police and a Drug Enforcement Administration spokeswoman said the team was serving an IRS warrant, but IRS officials did not confirm this.

DEA agents were near the scene during the raid but say they were there only to assist in the investigation.

Mr. Sharpless' criminal record includes drug and weapons charges. He was taken into custody by federal officials, while Ms. Villa faces charges of attempted capital murder and was being held Wednesday in the Dallas County Jail. The baby was taken into the custody of Child Protective Services.

Stash house?

One law enforcement official with knowledge of the investigation says the home was a "stash house" for a methamphetamine ring. Not a place where drugs were dealt, but where money and drugs were kept.

Dallas police said two handguns and a rifle were among the weapons found inside.

The home is at the end of a residential street and beside a used-tire shop. A couch sits on the front porch. A large screen in the home's front room monitors video from a surveillance system.

Some neighborhood residents said the area sees a lot of crime.

"There is so much noise here I can't sleep," neighbor Teresa Gonzalez said. "There are big parties, sirens and cars driving down the street."

The operation on Hollywood Avenue was one of several Dallas-area raids Wednesday. Officials declined to say whether they were connected.



Teamwork

Dallas officials consider Wednesday morning's incident another success in the area's cooperation between doctors and SWAT teams.

Drs. Eastman and Metzger were also on hand in February 2006 when four Dallas SWAT team officers were shot while helping the DEA serve federal drug warrants at a Red Bird-area home.

In that incident, all of the officers recovered.

The speed with which the doctors were able to open Lt. Marshall's airway was probably critical to his survival.

"I'm not sure what would have happened if we weren't there," Dr. Eastman said. "But I'm sure glad that we were."

Staff writers Kimberly Durnan, Eric Aasen, Jason Trahan and Scott Goldstein, researcher Darlean Spangenberger and Rebecca Lopez of WFAA-TV contributed to this report.

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