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Evidence that the Drug War is an incentive for Police Corruption

This is a long read but worth every second of your time. Sadly, it took the murder of an innocent 92 year-old-woman to bring these corrupt, illegal and widespread police tactics employed in the drug war to light. This type of lying, illegal searches and mistreatment of the citizens happens every day, on every police force in the US. Death of innocents, as a result, also happens a great deal more that most folks are aware of. It is way past time to end the drug war and to restore our constitutional and civil rights & liberties.

Two Atlanta Cops Plead Guilty in Woman's Death Atlanta Journal Constitution

What started with a few bags of marijuana being planted near a suspected street dealer quickly spiraled out of control. Narcotics officers lied to a judge, illegally broke into 92-year-old Kathryn Johnston's house, fired 39 shots at her -- and then one handcuffed her as she lay bleeding before he planted drugs in her basement.

The events of Nov. 21, outlined in court documents, were almost an "inevitable" outcome of a troubled police unit, a federal prosecutor said Thursday as two former Atlanta narcotics officers pleaded guilty and promised to cooperate in a wider probe of the department.

According to investigators, Atlanta narcotics officers hoped to satisfy goals set by police commanders by repeatedly lying to obtain search warrants, barging into homes and sometimes restraining innocent people, an atmosphere that led to tragedy.

The sweeping accusations were made in the guilty-plea agreements of Gregg Junnier and Jason R. Smith, two on a team of officers that took part in the botched raid at Johnston's home.

The deceit Nov. 21 didn't end with a faked warrant, according the officers' plea agreements -- they conspired to cover their actions by asking a confidential informant to lie for them. Instead, the informant went to authorities, giving birth to one of the biggest scandals to hit the Atlanta Police Department in years.

On Thursday, Police Chief Richard Pennington and other department leaders stood stone-faced as federal officials talked at a news

conference about misconduct on their watch.

"This has been a very painful five months in the police department," Pennington said. "The mayor and I, we wanted one thing to occur, to get to the bottom of this and let justice be meted [out]."

Falsified Search Warrants

In rapid succession Thursday, Smith and Junnier heard their indictments for felony murder read in court, pleaded guilty in state court to voluntary manslaughter and other state charges, then pleaded guilty in federal court on charges of conspiracy to violate a person's civil rights ending in death.

"Junnier and other officers falsified affidavits for search warrants to be considered productive officers and to meet APD's performance targets," according to a federal exhibit released Thursday. "They believed that these ends justified their illegal 'Fluffing' or falsifying of search warrants.

"Because they obtained search warrants based on unreliable and false information, [the officers] had on occasion searched residences where there were no drugs and the occupants were not drug dealers."

The officers' callous attitude was evident the day of the killing, said Fulton County prosecutor Peter Johnson. After getting a tip from a suspected low-level drug dealer that a kilo of cocaine was in a home at 933 Neal Street, Junnier said they could get a confidential informant to make a buy there to prove there were drugs there.

"Or not," Smith said, according to prosecutors' account.

The officers chose the latter and lied to a judge that they had sent an informant to the home, according to the plea agreement.

At an evening news conference, Greg Jones, head of Atlanta's FBI office, called the officers' conduct "deplorable" and said the agency will pursue "additional allegations of corruption that other Atlanta police officers may have engaged in similar conduct."

U.S. Attorney David Nahmias called Johnston's death "almost inevitable" because of such widespread activity and vowed a far-reaching investigation into departmental practices. He said he expects to find other cases where officers lied or relied on bad information.

"It's a very ongoing investigation into just how wide the culture of misconduct extends," Nahmias said. "We'll dig until we can find whatever we can."

Nahmias said: "The department must look forward to reform itself." But he added "ongoing public scrutiny" on APD is needed to make that happen.

The news conference was held at Lindsay Street Baptist Church, a few blocks from Johnston's home. It is the same church where Pennington and Mayor Shirley Franklin faced an angry crowd of residents just days after the shooting.

Pennington didn't hesitate to respond to questions that police higher-ups set arrest goals.

"The Atlanta Police Department does not have a quota system," he said. "Yes, we get on officers for performance. Any corporate system does that."

"We have enough crime in Atlanta; we don't have to get quotas," he said.

Community Not Satisfied

Thursday's event at the church got dicey again. State Rep. Able Mable Thomas, who represents the area, took federal prosecutors to task.

"The community is not satisfied with the plea bargain," she said. "The reality is the police are not off our back."

Nahmias tried to step in to get the conference back to a question-and-answer, when an irked Thomas waved him off. "The federal government just says close it!"

Markel Hutchins, the Johnston family's spokesman since the shooting, stepped up to the bank of microphones, saying, "We are quite comfortable this will be used as a tool to rid this community of this conduct."

During Thursday's state plea, a fidgeting and barely audible Smith leaned forward toward Fulton County Superior Court Judge Michael Johnson and said: "I wanted to say how regretful I am ... and sorry."

Junnier chose not to say anything, but his outspoken attorney, Rand Csehy, told the judge: "It's a case where the fish rotted from the head down," referring to police brass not properly training narcotics officers and turning a blind eye to improper tactics in that unit.

"Hopefully [the pleas] will reverberate through the police department" and help the narcotics unit clean up its act, Csehy said.

Under the plea deals, Junnier, who came forward to federal authorities Dec. 11, would get 10 years in federal prison and Smith would get 12 years and seven months.

The maximum penalty for the federal charge they accepted is life in prison. Their sentences could be shortened if they provide investigators with "substantial assistance" in their ongoing probe of the department.

In state court, multiple charges of felony murder as well as burglary and other charges were dropped.

Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard said his office has started looking at hundreds of cases in which the officers were involved. He said "as soon as we find out" corruption was involved, those convictions will be undone.

Smith, 35, a former Georgia National Guard officer who served in Iraq, was indicted on 13 felonies, including four counts of felony murder, violation of an oath by a public officer, two counts of giving false statements, two counts of burglary and one count each of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, false imprisonment and perjury.

Smith's attorney, John Garland, said his client "was trained to lie by fellow officers to establish probable cause."

Junnier, 40, with nine years in the narcotics unit, was charged with three counts of felony murder, violation of oath by a public officer, criminal solicitation, two counts of burglary and one count each of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon and making a false statement.

A third officer, Arthur Tesler, 40, is charged with violating his oath as an officer, making false statements and false imprisonment. Tesler, with eight months as a narcotics officer, vowed to fight charges against him.

His attorney, William McKenney, said Tesler was "pleased the grand jury listened to him. They saw [the more serious felonies] as baseless charges. The imprisonment [charge] is factually flawed and will be attacked."