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Santa Maria police officer, facing arrest, is killed by colleague

Police suspected the officer of having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl. He resisted arrest and fired his gun, police say, and a fellow officer fatally shot him.

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Santa Barbara County sheriff's investigators survey the place where a Santa Maria police officer was fatally shot early Saturday. (Leah Thompson, Santa Maria Times / January 28, 2012)

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By Rong-Gong Lin II, Los Angeles Times
January 30, 2012

A Santa Maria police officer suspected of having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl was shot and killed by a fellow officer as he was about to be arrested, authorities said.

The officer, who has not been formally identified, was near the

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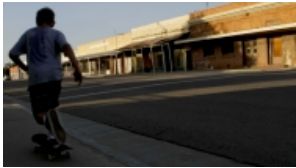
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end of his shift at a DUI checkpoint when supervisors arrived after 1 a.m. Saturday to detain him, Police Chief Danny R. Macagni told reporters at a news conference. There was a struggle, the suspected officer fired his gun and a fellow officer then shot him in the chest, Macagni said.

"He chose to resist," Macagni said. "He drew his weapon. A fight ensued. He fired his weapon. And one of my officers that was there also discharged his weapon, and the officer was fatally wounded."

The officer, who was married and was a four-year veteran of the department, was pronounced dead at Marian Medical Center after undergoing emergency surgery. No one else was injured. The officer's father and sister, speaking to KCOY-TV in Santa Maria, identified him as Albert Covarrubias Jr., 29.

The dramatic shooting of a police officer by a colleague in the same unit roiled this northern Santa Barbara County city of 100,000, known more for its tri-tip and Elks rodeo than violent crime.

"It's a very, very tragic day," Macagni said.

In a briefing posted to the website of KCOY-TV, the police chief said developments in the probe of the officer forced police to take immediate action.

He said detectives believed that the officer knew he was under investigation, that witnesses were being intimidated, and that the public would be at risk if the officer was not arrested before he left his shift.

"The information that we had in hand demanded that we not let him leave that scene, get in a car, drive somewhere. It would put the public at risk if he did," Macagni said. "We just did not know what was going to happen. And we did not expect him to react the way he did."

Macagni outlined some details of the police investigation:

Santa Maria police detectives were made aware of allegations that the officer was involved in an inappropriate relationship with a 17-year-old girl, but the information was sketchy.

Detectives continued the investigation into Friday evening, while the officer began his shift at a DUI checkpoint at Broadway and McElhany Avenue, near a fast-food restaurant,

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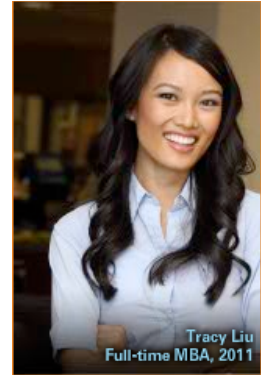
a liquor store and a market.

"Information unfolded during the time that the officer was on duty and unfolded very rapidly. It was very explicit, very specific, that indicated that the officer was involved in not only an inappropriate sexual relationship, but a very explicit one, and it demanded immediate action," Macagni said.

By 1 a.m. Saturday, detectives had enough information to arrest the officer, who would have been booked on multiple felony counts.

Two police supervisors were dispatched to the checkpoint to make the arrest. A fight ensued, and the suspected officer was fatally shot by an officer who had been working at the DUI checkpoint with him.

"We had no choice. And I am not at liberty to divulge the specifics of the ongoing information that caused us to take the action that we did," Macagni said. "But let me stress the fact that we had information in hand that was very specific, that demanded we go out and take this officer off the street immediately. There is some witness intimidation involved, and the allegations of sexual misconduct are very explicit."



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Macagni added: "We also understand that the community demands that we hold our people to a very high standard, and this type of conduct by a sworn police officer ... cannot be tolerated, and agencies will take the necessary enforcement action to take these people off the streets."

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department is investigating the shooting.

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o9silver at 7:59 AM January 30, 2012

"The officer, who has not been formally identified, was near the end of his shift at a DUI checkpoint when supervisors arrived after 1 a.m. Saturday to detain him".
"Supervisors" = Judge, Jury, & Executioner.

danika62 at 7:58 AM January 30, 2012

I live in this area and Santa Maria has daily criminal incidents. Stabbings, shootings, robberies, etc. It has the reputation of gang paradise.

newznose at 7:56 AM January 30, 2012

The officer was killed by his best friend. The deceased had been married for only 3 weeks. Here is the story not told by the LA Times:
http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2012/01/29/1927613/family-names-calif-officer-shot.html#storylink=omni_popular

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