

Prosecutor rules Bremerton police shooting justified, criticizes mental health system

By Josh Farley

Friday, November 15, 2013

PORT ORCHARD —A Bremerton police officer was justified in shooting and wounding a knife-wielding mentally ill woman in August, Kitsap County Prosecutor Russ Hauge has ruled.

Officer Frank Shaw “used the only tool he had available that could resolve the situation, his pistol,” Kitsap County Prosecutor Russ Hauge wrote in a memorandum to the county’s top law enforcement officers.

While Hauge’s report declares the shooting justified, the prosecutor takes issue with how the county handles services for mental illness. Without reform, Hauge indicated, similar circumstances could re-occur in the future.

“From the investigation I conclude that Officer Shaw’s use of deadly force was justified, professional, and, in the mental health care system we have created, inevitable,” Hauge wrote.

Bremerton officers were called to a domestic disturbance in an apartment on the 1900 block of Naval Avenue on Aug. 11. The man who lived with Ann Marie Sommermeyer reported she wasn’t taking her medications, was making threats and had been up for days “carrying on conversations with imaginary persons.” Inside, Shaw and Officer Floyd May found Sommermeyer locked in a bathroom, “delusional and carrying on a conversation with herself,” Hauge wrote.

Hauge notes police had been called to her home 17 times since December 2005, often for threats or allegations she had made.

When May tried to go inside to check on her, she rushed out clutching two butcher knives. May tripped and fell backward onto a bed and Shaw, backing May, drew his gun. As she came at Shaw, he tripped and fell over a coffee table.

As he fell, he opened fire, firing five shots. She was hit in four places and taken to Harborview Medical Center, where she recovered.

Sommermeyer was [charged with first-degree assault](#) and remains jailed on \$500,000 bail. A state mental health expert suggested she is not competent to stand trial and Kitsap County Superior Court

Judge Kevin Hull has ruled she be placed in a secure state facility to attempt to make her competent. The next hearing in the case is Feb. 5.

Hauge's memo says the current mental health system "left her living marginally in a small apartment with a companion who had his own issues to deal with."

"The system subsidized her psychotropic medications but left it to her to take those medications on the schedule required for them to have effect," Hauge wrote. "It also left her alone to self-medicate with alcohol and other drugs."

Both Shaw and May have long since returned to duty, as Hauge and the Bremerton Police Department had done a preliminary review in the case.

Bremerton Police Chief Steve Strachan said he appreciated Hauge's review.

"He was honest and direct about a complex issue. He's saying what needs to be said," Strachan said. "I hope it starts a conversation with the community."

